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THE REVEREND JOHN CREEDY.

I.



'ON Sunday next, the 14th inst., the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., of Magdalén College, Oxford, will preach in Walton Magna Church, on behalf of the Gold Coast Mission.' Not a very startling announcement that, and yet, simple as it looks, it stirred Ethel Berry's soul to its inmost depths. For Ethel had been brought up by her Aunt Emily to look upon foreign missions as the one thing on earth worth living for and thinking about, and the Reverend John Creedy, B.A. had a missionary history of his own, strange enough even in these strange days of queer juxtapositions between utter savagery and advanced civilisation.

'Only think,' she said to her aunt, as they read the placard on the schoolhouse-board, 'he's a real African negro, the vicar says, taken from a

slaver on the Gold Coast when he was a child, and brought to England to be educated. He's been to Oxford and got a degree; and now he's going out again to Africa to convert his own

people. And he's coming down to the vicar's to stay on Wednesday.'

'It's my belief,' said old Uncle James, Aunt Emily's brother, the superannuated skipper, 'that he'd much better stop in England for ever. I've been a good bit on the Coast myself in my time, after palm oil and such, and my opinion is that a nigger's a nigger anywhere, but he's a sight less of a nigger in England than out yonder in Africa. Take him to England, and you make a gentleman of him : send him home again, and the nigger comes out at once in spite of you.'

'Oh, James,' Aunt Emily put in, 'how can you talk such unchristianlike talk, setting yourself up against missions, when we know that all the nations of the earth are made of one blood.'

'I've always lived a Christian life myself, Emily,' answered Uncle James, 'though I have cruised a good bit on the Coast, too, which is against it, certainly ; but I take it a nigger's a nigger whatever you do with him. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, the Scripture says, nor the leopard his spots, and a nigger he'll be to the end of his days ; you mark my words, Emily.'

On Wednesday, in due course, the Reverend John Creedy arrived at the vicarage, and much curiosity there was throughout the village of Walton Magna that week to see this curious new thing, a coal-black parson. Next day, Thursday, an almost equally unusual event occurred to Ethel Berry, for to her great surprise she got a little note in the morning inviting her up to a tennis party at the vicarage the same afternoon. Now, though the vicar called on Aunt Emily often enough, and accepted her help readily for school feasts and other village festivities of the milder sort, the Berrys were hardly up to that level of society which is commonly invited to the parson's lawn tennis parties. And the reason why Ethel was asked on this particular Thursday must be traced to a certain pious conspiracy between the vicar and the secretary of the Gold Coast Evangelistic Society. When those two eminent missionary advocates had met a fortnight before at Exeter Hall, the secretary had represented to the vicar the desirability of young John Creedy's taking to himself an English wife before his departure. 'It will steady him, and keep him right on the Coast,' he said, 'and it will give him importance in the eyes of the natives as well.' Whereto the vicar responded that he knew exactly the

right girl to suit the place in his own parish, and that by a providential conjunction she already took a deep interest in foreign missions. So these two good men conspired in all innocence of heart to sell poor Ethel into African slavery; and the vicar had asked John Creedy down to Walton Magna on purpose to meet her.

That afternoon Ethel put on her pretty sateen and her witching little white hat, with two natural dog-roses pinned on one side, and went pleased and proud up to the vicarage. The Reverend John Creedy was there, not in full clerical costume, but arrayed in tennis flannels, with only a loose white tie beneath his flap collar to mark his newly-acquired spiritual dignity. He was a comely looking negro enough, full-blooded, but not too broad-faced nor painfully African in type; and when he was playing tennis his athletic quick limbs and his really handsome build took away greatly from the general impression of an inferior race. His voice was of the ordinary Oxford type, open, pleasant, and refined, with a certain easy-going air of natural gentility, hardly marred by just the faintest tinge of the thick negro blur in the broad vowels. When he talked to Ethel—and the vicar's wife took good care that they should talk together a great deal—his conversation was of a sort that she seldom heard at Walton Magna. It was full of London and Oxford, of boat-races at Iffley and cricket matches at Lord's; of people and books whose very names Ethel had never heard—one of them was a Mr. Mill, she thought, and another a Mr. Aristotle—but which she felt vaguely to be one step higher in the intellectual scale than her own level. Then his friends, to whom he alluded casually, not like one who airs his grand acquaintances, were such very distinguished people. There was a real live lord, apparently, at the same college with him, and he spoke of a young baronet whose estate lay close by, as plain 'Harrington of Christchurch,' without any 'Sir Arthur'—a thing which even the vicar himself would hardly have ventured to do. She knew that he was learned, too; as a matter of fact he had taken a fair second class in Greats at Oxford; and he could talk delightfully of poetry and novels. To say the truth, John Creedy, in spite of his black face, dazzled poor Ethel, for he was more of a scholar and a gentleman than anybody with whom she had ever before had the chance of conversing on equal terms.

When Ethel turned the course of talk to Africa, the young

parson was equally eloquent and fascinating. He didn't care about leaving England for many reasons, but he would be glad to do something for his poor brethren. He was enthusiastic about missions; that was a common interest; and he was so anxious to raise and improve the condition of his fellow-negroes that Ethel couldn't help feeling what a noble thing it was of him thus to sacrifice himself, cultivated gentleman as he was, in an African jungle, for his heathen countrymen. Altogether, she went home from the tennis-court that afternoon thoroughly overcome by John Creedy's personality. She didn't for a moment think of falling in love with him—a certain indescribable race-instinct set up an impassable barrier against that—but she admired him and was interested in him in a way that she had never yet felt with any other man.

As for John Creedy, he was naturally charmed with Ethel. In the first place, he would have been charmed with any English girl who took so much interest in himself and his plans, for, like all negroes, he was frankly egotistical, and delighted to find a white lady who seemed to treat him as a superior being. But in the second place, Ethel was really a charming, simple English village lassie, with sweet little manners and a delicious blush, who might have impressed a far less susceptible man than the young negro parson. So whatever Ethel felt, John Creedy felt himself truly in love. And after all, John Creedy was in all essentials an educated English gentleman, with the same chivalrous feelings towards a pretty and attractive girl that every English gentleman ought to have.

On Sunday morning Aunt Emily and Ethel went to the parish church, and the Reverend John Creedy preached the expected sermon. It was almost his first—sounded like a trial trip, Uncle James muttered—but it was undoubtedly what connoisseurs describe as an admirable discourse. John Creedy was free from any tinge of nervousness—negroes never know what that word means—and he spoke fervently, eloquently, and with much power of manner about the necessity for a Gold Coast Mission. Perhaps there was really nothing very original or striking in what he said, but his way of saying it was impressive and vigorous. The negro, like many other lower races, has the faculty of speech largely developed, and John Creedy had been noted as one of the readiest and most fluent talkers at the Oxford Union debates. When he enlarged upon the need for workers, the need for help, the need

for succour and sympathy in the great task of evangelisation, Aunt Emily and Ethel forgot his black hands, stretched out open-palmed towards the people, and felt only their hearts stirred within them by the eloquence and enthusiasm of that appealing gesture.

The end of it all was, that instead of a week John Creedy stopped for two months at Walton Magna, and during all that time he saw a great deal of Ethel. Before the end of the first fortnight he walked out one afternoon along the river bank with her, and talked earnestly of his expected mission.



'Miss Berry,' he said, as they sat to rest awhile on the parapet of the little bridge by the weeping willows, 'I don't mind going to Africa, but I can't bear going all alone. I am to have a station entirely by myself up the Aneobra river, where I shall see no other Christian face from year's end to year's end. I wish I could have had some one to accompany me.'

'You will be very lonely,' Ethel answered. 'I wish indeed you could have some companionship.'

'Do you really?' John Creedy went on. 'It is not good for

man to live alone, he wants a helpmate. Oh, Miss Ethel, may I venture to hope that perhaps, if I can try to deserve you, you will be mine ?'

Ethel started in dismay. Mr. Creedy had been very attentive, very kind, and she had liked to hear him talk and had encouraged his coming, but she was hardly prepared for this. The nameless something in our blood recoiled at it. The proposal stunned her, and she said nothing but 'Oh, Mr. Creedy, how *can* you say such a thing ?'

John Creedy saw the shadow on her face, the unintentional dilatation of her delicate nostrils, the faint puckering at the corner of her lips, and knew with a negro's quick instinct of face-reading what it all meant. 'Oh, Miss Ethel,' he said, with a touch of genuine bitterness in his tone, 'don't you, too, despise us. I won't ask you for any answer now; I don't want an answer. But I want you to think it over. Do think it over, and consider whether you can ever love me. I won't press the matter on you, I won't insult you by importunity, but I will tell you just this once, and once for all, what I feel. I love you, and I shall always love you, whatever you answer me now. I know it would cost you a wrench to take me, a greater wrench than to take the least and the unworthiest of your own people. But if you can only get over that first wrench, I can promise earnestly and faithfully to love you as well as ever woman yet was loved. Don't say anything now,' he went on, as he saw she was going to open her mouth again: 'wait and think it over; pray it over; and if you can't see your way straight before you when I ask you this day fortnight "yes or no," answer me "no," and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman I will never speak to you of the matter again. But I shall carry your picture written on my heart to my grave.'

And Ethel knew that he was speaking from his very soul.

When she went home, she took Aunt Emily up into her little bedroom, over the porch where the dog-roses grew, and told her all about it. Aunt Emily cried and sobbed as if her heart would break, but she saw only one answer from the first. 'It is a gate opened to you, my darling,' she said: 'I shall break my heart over it, Ethel, but it is a gate opened.' And though she felt that all the light would be gone out of her life if Ethel went, she worked with her might from that moment forth to induce Ethel to marry John Creedy and go to Africa. Poor soul, she acted faithfully up to her lights.

As for Uncle James, he looked at the matter very differently. 'Her instinct is against it,' he said stoutly, 'and our instincts wasn't put in our hearts for nothing. They're meant to be a guide and a light to us in these dark questions. No white girl ought to marry a black man, even if he *is* a parson. It ain't natural: our instinct is again it. A white man may marry a black woman if he likes: I don't say anything again him, though I don't say I'd do it myself, not for any money. But a white woman to marry a black man, why, it makes our blood rise, you know, 'specially if you've happened to have cruised worth speaking of along the Coast.'

But the vicar and the vicar's wife were charmed with the prospect of success, and spoke seriously to Ethel about it. It was a call, they thought, and Ethel oughtn't to disregard it. They had argued themselves out of those wholesome race instincts that Uncle James so rightly valued, and they were eager to argue Ethel out of them too. What could the poor girl do? Her aunt and the vicar on the one hand, and John Creedy on the other, were too much between them for her native feelings. At the end of the fortnight John Creedy asked her his simple question, 'yes or no,' and half against her will she answered 'yes.' John Creedy took her hand delicately in his and fervidly kissed the very tips of her fingers; something within him told him he must not kiss her lips. She started at the kiss, but she said nothing. John Creedy noticed the start, and said within himself, 'I shall so love and cherish her that I will make her love me in spite of my black skin.' For with all the faults of his negro nature, John Creedy was at heart an earnest and affectionate man, after his kind.

And Ethel really did, to some extent, love him already. It was such a strange mixture of feeling. From one point of view he was a gentleman by position, a clergyman, a man of learning and of piety; and from this point of view Ethel was not only satisfied, but even proud of him. For the rest, she took him as some good Catholics take the veil, from a sense of the call. And so, before the two months were out, Ethel Berry had married John Creedy, and both started together at once for Southampton, on their way to Axim. Aunt Emily cried, and hoped they might be blessed in their new work, but Uncle James never lost his misgivings about the effect of Africa upon a born African. 'Instincts is a great thing,' he said, with a shake of his head, as he

saw the West Coast mail steam slowly down Southampton Water
'and when he gets among his own people his instincts will surely
get the better of him, as safe as my name is James Berry.'

II.

The little mission bungalow at Butabué, a wooden shed neatly thatched with fan palms, had been built and garnished by the native catechist from Axim and his wife before the arrival of the missionaries, so that Ethel found a habitable dwelling ready for her at the end of her long boat journey up the rapid stream of the Ancobra. There the strangely matched pair settled down quietly enough to their work of teaching and catechising, for the mission had already been started by the native evangelist, and many of the people were fairly ready to hear and accept the new religion. For the first ten or twelve months Ethel's letters home were full of praise and love for dear John. Now that she had come to know him well, she wondered she had ever feared to marry him. No husband was ever so tender, so gentle, so considerate. He nursed her in all her little ailments like a woman ; she leaned on him as a wife leans on the strong arm of her husband. And then he was so clever, so wise, so learned. Her only grief was that she feared she was not and would never be good enough for him. Yet it was well for her that they were living so entirely away from all white society at Butabué, for there she had nobody with whom to contrast John but the half-clad savages around them. Judged by the light of that startling contrast, good John Creedy, with his cultivated ways and gentle manners, seemed like an Englishman indeed.

John Creedy, for his part, thought no less well of his Ethel. He was tenderly respectful to her; more distant, perhaps, than is usual between husband and wife, even in the first months of marriage, but that was due to his innate delicacy of feeling, which made him half unconsciously recognise the depth of the gulf that still divided them. He cherished her like some saintly thing, too sacred for the common world. Yet Ethel was his helper in all his work, so cheerful under the necessary privations of their life, so ready to put up with bananas and cassava balls, so apt at kneading plantain paste, so willing to learn from the negro women all the mysteries of mixing agadey, cankey, and

koko pudding. No tropical heat seemed to put her out of temper; even the horrible country fever itself she bore with such gentle resignation John Creedy felt in his heart of hearts that he would willingly give up his life for her, and that it would be but a small sacrifice for so sweet a creature.

One day, shortly after their arrival at Butabué, John Creedy began talking in English to the catechist about the best way of setting to work to learn the native language. He had left the country when he was nine years old he said, and had forgotten all about it. The catechist answered him quickly in a Fantee phrase. John Creedy looked amazed and started.

'What does he say?' asked Ethel.

'He says that I will soon learn if only I listen, but the curious thing is, Ethie, that I understand him.'

'It has come back to you, John, that's all. You are so quick at languages, and now you hear it again you remember it.'

'Perhaps so,' said the missionary, slowly, 'but I have never recalled a word of it for all these years. I wonder if it will all come back to me.'

'Of course it will, dear,' said Ethel; 'you know things come to you so easily in that way. You almost learned Portuguese while we were coming out from hearing those Benguela people.'

And so it did come back, sure enough. Before John Creedy had been six weeks at Butabué, he could talk Fantee as fluently as any of the natives around him. After all, he was nine years old when he was taken to England, and it was no great wonder that he should recollect the language he had heard in his childhood till that age. Still, he himself noticed rather uneasily that every phrase and word, down to the very heathen charms and prayers of his infancy, came back to him now with startling vividness and without an effort.

Four months after their arrival John saw one day a tall and ugly negro woman, in the scanty native dress, standing near the rude market place where the Butabué butchers killed and sold their reeking goat-meat. Ethel saw him start again, and with a terrible foreboding in her heart, she could not help asking him why he started. 'I can't tell you, Ethie,' he said, piteously, 'for heaven's sake don't press me. I want to spare you.' But Ethel would hear. 'Is it your mother, John?' she asked, hoarsely.

'No, thank heaven, not my mother, Ethie,' he answered her, with something like pallor on his dark cheek, 'not my mother; but I remember the woman.'

'A relative?'

'Oh, Ethie, don't press me. Yes, my mother's sister. I remember her years ago. Let us say no more about it.' And Ethel, looking at that gaunt and squalid savage woman, shuddered in her heart and said no more.

Slowly, as time went on, however, Ethel began to notice a strange shade of change coming over John's ideas and remarks about the negroes. At first he had been shocked and distressed at their heathendom and savagery, but the more he saw of it the more he seemed to find it natural enough in their position, and even in a sort of way to sympathise with it or apologise for it. One morning, a month or two later, he spoke to her voluntarily of his father. He had never done so in England. 'I can remember,' he said, 'he was a chief, a great chief. He had many wives, and my mother was one. He was beaten in war by Kola, and I was taken prisoner. But he had a fine palace at Kwantah, and many fan-bearers.' Ethel observed with a faint terror that he seemed to speak with pride and complacency of his father's chieftaincy. She shuddered again and wondered. Was the West African instinct getting the upper hand in him over the Christian gentleman?

When the dries were over, and the koko-harvest gathered, the negroes held a grand feast. John had preached in the open air to some of the market people in the morning, and in the evening he was sitting in the hut with Ethel, waiting till the catechist and his wife should come in to prayers, for they carried out their accustomed ceremony decorously, even there, every night and morning. Suddenly they heard the din of savage music out of doors, and the noise of a great crowd laughing and shouting down the street. John listened, and listened with deepening attention. 'Don't you hear it, Ethie?' he cried. 'It's the tom-toms. I know what it means. It's the harvest battle-feast!'

'How hideous,' said Ethel, shrinking back.

'Don't be afraid, dearest,' John said, smiling at her. 'It means no harm. It's only the people amusing themselves.' And he began to keep time to the tom-toms rapidly with the palms of his hands.

The din drew nearer, and John grew more evidently excited

at every step. ‘Don’t you hear, Ethie?’ he said again. ‘It’s the Salonga. What inspiriting music! It’s like a drum and fife band; it’s like the bagpipes; it’s like a military march. By Jove, it compels one to dance.’ And he got up as he spoke, in English clerical dress (for he wore clerical dress even at Butabué), and began capering in a sort of hornpipe round the tiny room.

‘Oh, John, don’t,’ cried Ethel. ‘Suppose the catechist were to come in!’

But John’s blood was up. ‘Look here,’ he said excitedly, ‘it goes like this. Here you hold your matchlock out; here you fire; here you charge with cutlasses; here you hack them down before you; here you hold up your enemy’s head in your hands, and here you kick it off among the women. Oh, it’s grand!’ There was a terrible light in his black eyes as he spoke, and a terrible trembling in his clenched black hands.

‘John,’ cried Ethel, in an agony of horror, ‘it isn’t Christian, it isn’t human, it isn’t worthy of you. I can never, never love you if you do such a thing again.’

In a moment John’s face changed and his hand fell as if she had stabbed him. ‘Ethie,’ he said in a low voice, creeping back to her like a whipped spaniel, ‘Ethie, my darling, my own soul, my beloved; what *have* I done! Oh, heavens, I will never listen to the accursed thing again. Oh, Ethie, for heaven’s sake, for mercy’s sake, forgive me!’

Ethel laid her hand, trembling, on his head. John sank upon his knees before her, and bowed himself down with his head between his arms, like one staggered and penitent. Ethel lifted him gently, and at that moment the catechist and his wife came in. John stood up firmly, took down his Bible and Prayer-book, and read through evening prayer at once in his usual impressive tone. In one moment he had changed back again from the Fantee savage to the decorous Oxford clergyman.

It was only a week later that Ethel, hunting about in the little store-room, happened to notice a stout wooden box carefully covered up. She opened the lid with some difficulty, for it was fastened down with a native lock, and to her horror she found inside it a surreptitious keg of raw negro rum. She took the keg out, put it conspicuously in the midst of the store-room, and said nothing. That night she heard John in the jungle behind the yard, and looking out, she saw dimly that he was hacking the

keg to pieces vehemently with an axe. After that he was even kinder and tenderer to her than usual for the next week, but Ethel vaguely remembered that once or twice before, he had seemed a little odd in his manner, and that it was on those days that she had seen gleams of the savage nature peeping through. Perhaps, she thought, with a shiver, his civilisation was only a veneer, and a glass of raw rum or so was enough to wash it off.

Twelve months after their first arrival, Ethel came home very feverish one evening from her girls' school, and found John gone from the hut. Searching about in the room for the quinine



bottle, she came once more upon a rum-keg, and this time it was empty. A nameless terror drove her into the little bedroom. There, on the bed, torn into a hundred shreds, lay John Creedy's black coat and European clothing. The room whirled around her, and though she had never heard of such a thing before, the terrible truth flashed across her bewildered mind like a hideous dream. She went out, alone, at night, as she had never done before since she came to Africa, into the broad lane between the huts which constituted the chief street of Butabué. So far away from home, so utterly solitary among all those black faces, so sick at heart with that burning and devouring horror! She

reeled and staggered down the street, not knowing how or where she went, till at the end, beneath the two tall date-palms, she saw lights flashing and heard the noise of shouts and laughter. A group of natives, men and women together, were dancing and howling round a dancing and howling negro. The central figure was dressed in the native fashion, with arms and legs bare, and he was shouting a loud song at the top of his voice in the Fantee language, while he shook a tom-tom. There was a huskiness as of drink in his throat, and his steps were unsteady and doubtful. Great heavens! could that reeling, shrieking black savage be John Creedy?

Yes, instinct had gained the day over civilisation; the savage in John Creedy had broken out; he had torn up his English clothes and, in West African parlance, 'had gone Fantee.' Ethel gazed at him white with horror—stood still and gazed, and never cried nor fainted, nor said a word. The crowd of negroes divided to right and left, and John Creedy saw his wife standing there like a marble figure. With one awful cry he came to himself again, and rushed to her side. She did not repel him, as he expected; she did not speak; she was mute and cold like a corpse, not like a living woman. He took her up in his strong arms, laid her head on his shoulder, and carried her home through the long line of thatched huts, erect and steady as when he first walked up the aisle of Walton Magna church. Then he laid her down gently on the bed, and called the wife of the catechist. 'She has the fever,' he said in Fantee. 'Sit by her.'

The catechist's wife looked at her, and said, 'Yes; the yellow fever.'

And so she had. Even before she saw John the fever had been upon her, and that awful revelation had brought it out suddenly in full force. She lay unconscious upon the bed, her eyes open, staring ghastly, but not a trace of colour in her cheek nor a sign of life upon her face.

John Creedy wrote a few words on a piece of paper, which he folded in his hand, gave a few directions in Fantee to the woman at the bedside, and then hurried out like one on fire into the darkness outside.

III.

It was thirty miles through the jungle, by a native trackway, to the nearest mission station at Effuenta. There were two Methodist missionaries stationed there, John Creedy knew, for he had gone round by boat more than once to see them. When he first came to Africa he could no more have found his way across the neck of the river fork by that tangled jungle track than he could have flown bodily over the top of the cocoa palms; but now, half naked, barefooted, and inspired with an overpowering emotion, he threaded his path through the darkness among the creepers and lianas of the forest in true African fashion. Stooping here, crawling on all fours there, running in the open at full speed anon, he never once stopped to draw breath till he had covered the whole thirty miles, and knocked in the early dawn at the door of the mission hut at Effuenta.

One of the missionaries opened the barred door cautiously. 'What do you want?' he asked in Fantee of the bare-legged savage who stood crouching by the threshold.

'I bring a message from Missionary John Creedy,' the bare-legged savage answered, also in Fantee. 'He wants European clothes.'

'Has he sent a letter?' asked the missionary.

John Creedy took the folded piece of paper from his palm. The missionary read it. It told him in a few words how the Butabué people had pillaged John's hut at night and stolen his clothing, and how he could not go outside his door till he got some European dress again.

'This is strange,' said the missionary. 'Brother Felton died three days ago of the fever. You can take his clothes to Brother Creedy, if you will.'

The bare-limbed savage nodded acquiescence. The missionary looked hard at him, and fancied he had seen his face before, but he never even for a moment suspected that he was speaking to John Creedy himself.

A bundle was soon made of dead Brother Felton's clothes, and the bare-limbed man took it in his arms and prepared to run back again the whole way to Butabué.

'You have had nothing to eat,' said the lonely missionary. 'Won't you take something to help you on your way?'

'Give me some plantain paste,' answered John Creedy. 'I can eat it as I go.' And when they gave it him he forgot himself for the moment, and answered 'Thank you' in English. The missionary stared, but thought it was only a single phrase that he had picked up at Butabué, and that he was anxious, negro-fashion, to air his knowledge.

Back through the jungle, with the bundle in his arms, John Creedy wormed his way once more, like a snake or a tiger, never pausing or halting on the road till he found himself again in the open space outside the village of Butabué. There he stayed awhile, and behind a clump of wild ginger, he opened the bundle and arrayed himself once more from head to foot in English clerical dress. That done, too proud to slink, he walked bold and erect down the main alley, and quietly entered his own hut. It was high noon, the baking high noon of Africa, as he did so.

Ethel lay unconscious still upon the bed. The negro woman crouched, half asleep after her night's watching, at the foot. John Creedy looked at his watch, which stood hard by on the little wooden table. 'Sixty miles in fourteen hours,' he said aloud. 'Better time by a great deal than when we walked from Oxford to the White Horse, eighteen months since.' And then he sat down silently by Ethel's bedside.

'Has she moved her eyes?' he asked the negress.

'Never, John Creedy,' answered the woman. Till last night she had always called him 'Master.'

He watched the lifeless face for an hour or two. There was no change in it till about four o'clock; then Ethel's eyes began to alter their expression. He saw the dilated pupils contract a little, and knew that consciousness was gradually returning.

In a moment more she looked round at him and gave a little cry. 'John,' she exclaimed, with a sort of awakening hopefulness in her voice, 'where on earth did you get those clothes?'

'These clothes?' he answered softly. 'Why, you must be wandering in your mind, Ethie dearest, to ask such a question now. At Standen's, in the High at Oxford, my darling.' And he passed his black hand gently across her loose hair.

Ethel gave a great cry of joy. 'Then it was a dream, a horrid dream, John, or a terrible mistake? Oh, John, say it was a dream!'

John drew his hand across his forehead slowly. 'Ethie darling,'

he said, 'you are wandering, I'm afraid. You have a bad fever. I don't know what you mean.'

'Then you didn't tear them up, and wear a Fantee dress, and dance with a tom-tom down the street? Oh, John!'

'Oh, Ethel! No. What a terrible delirium you must have had!'

'It is all well,' she said. 'I don't mind if I die now.' And she sank back exhausted into a sort of feverish sleep.

'John Creedy,' said the black catechist's wife solemnly, in Fantee, 'you will have to answer for that lie to a dying woman with your soul!'

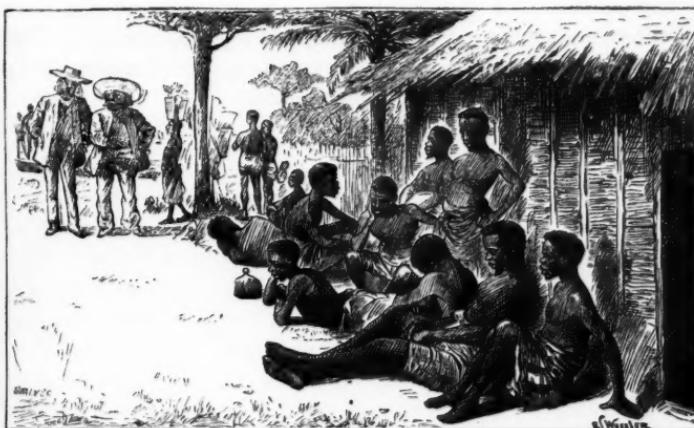
'*My soul!*' cried John Creedy passionately, smiting both his breasts with his clenched fists. '*My soul!* Do you think, you negro wench, I wouldn't give *my* poor, miserable, black soul to eternal torments a thousand times over, if only I could give her little white heart one moment's forgetfulness before she dies?'

For five days longer Ethel lingered in the burning fever, sometimes conscious for a minute or two, but for the most part delirious or drowsy all the time. She never said another word to John about her terrible dream, and John never said another word to her. But he sat by her side and tended her like a woman, doing everything that was possible for her in the bare little hut, and devouring his full heart with a horrible gnawing remorse too deep for pen or tongue to probe and fathom. For civilisation with John Creedy was really at bottom far more than a mere veneer; though the savage instincts might break out with him now and again, such outbursts no more affected his adult and acquired nature than a single bump supper or wine party at college affects the nature of many a gentle-minded English lad. The truest John Creedy of all was the gentle, tender, English clergyman.

As he sat by her bedside sleepless and agonised, night and day for five days together, one prayer only rose to his lips time after time: 'Heaven grant she may die!' He had depth enough in the civilised side of his soul to feel that that was the only way to save her from a life-long shame. 'If she gets well,' he said to himself, trembling, 'I will leave this accursed Africa at once. I will work my way back to England as a common sailor, and send her home by the mail with my remaining money. I will never inflict my presence upon her again, for she cannot be persuaded, if once

she recovers, that she did not see me, as she did see me, a bare-limbed heathen Fantee brandishing a devilish tom-tom. But I shall get work in England—not a parson's; that I can never be again—but clerk's work, labourer's work, navvy's work, anything! Look at my arms: I rowed five in the Magdalen eight: I could hold a spade as well as any man. I will toil, and slave, and save, and keep her still like a lady, if I starve for it myself, but she shall never see my face again, if once she recovers. Even then, it will be a living death for her, poor angel! There is only one hope—Heaven grant she may die!

On the fifth day she opened her eyes once. John saw that his



prayer was about to be fulfilled. ‘John,’ she said feebly—‘John, tell me, on your honour, it was only my delirium.’

And John, raising his hand to heaven, *splendide mendax*, answered in a firm voice, ‘I swear it.’

Ethel smiled and shut her eyes. It was for the last time.

Next morning, John Creedy—tearless, but parched and dry in the mouth, like one stunned and unmanned—took a pickaxe and hewed out a rude grave in the loose soil near the river. Then he fashioned a rough coffin from twisted canes with his own hands, and in it he reverently placed the sacred body. He allowed no one to help him or come near him—not even his fellow-Christians, the catechist and his wife: Ethel was too holy a thing for their African hands to touch. Next he put on his white surplice, and

for the first and only time in his life he read, without a quaver in his voice, the Church of England burial service over the open grave. And when he had finished he went back to his desolate hut, and cried with a loud voice of utter despair, ‘The one thing that bound me to civilisation is gone. Henceforth I shall never speak another word of English. I go to my own people.’ So saying, he solemnly tore up his European clothes once more, bound a cotton loin-cloth round his waist, covered his head with dirt, and sat fasting and wailing piteously, like a broken-hearted child, in his cabin.

Nowadays, the old half-caste Portuguese rum-dealer at Butabué can point out to any English pioneer who comes up the river which one, among a crowd of dilapidated negroes who lie basking in the soft dust outside his hut, was once the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., of Magdalen College, Oxford.

THE FRENCH NEWSPAPER PRESS.

IN TWO PARTS.

II.

LITERARY criticism in France is afflicted with a peculiar malady. There are no critical reviews, as in England and America, organs free from all political passion and influence, and delivering a literary verdict with the absolute impartiality of purely literary criticism. French literary criticism, so far as it can be said to exist, is enrolled in a journal, and it belongs more or less to the colour and tendencies of that journal, and if not to its prejudices, at least to its principles. And so it happens that the spirit of the book, or the spirit of the author, is generally considered before the value of the book itself. The critic can with difficulty admire in another camp or criticise in his own. If a novel has a Catholic hero, the critic of the anti-clerical journal will declare it to be detestable. If the hero of the novel be a Voltairian, the Catholic journal will anathematise both the book and the author. Whatever Victor Hugo writes will be proclaimed sublime by the 'Rappel' and ignoble by the 'Union,' and from one end of France to the other you will hardly find a single writer who ventures to express a candid and independent opinion. We make an exception in favour of one critic, M. Schérer, of 'Le Temps,' who has taken up the succession of Sainte-Beuve without Sainte-Beuve's knowledge or brilliancy. M. Schérer is an honest critic, but his influence over the public is small. It may be said without exaggeration that literary criticism in France at the present day is dead. The literary standard of the press itself as a whole is no longer what it was in the time of the Restoration, or even of the Second Empire. Indeed, liberty of the press in France would appear to be unfavourable to literary excellence, and doubtless if, under the two régimes just mentioned, the press had been left free to discuss and to criticise the affairs of the nation and of the Government, the *littérateurs* and stylists would not have occupied the place they did. The high-class newspapers of the Empire were, if one may say it, elegant salons, where a brilliant talker was listened to with delight by a chosen circle ; in the universal silence the literary

articles of Taine or of Sainte-Beuve and the fine witticisms of Prévost-Paradol had at least a nine days' celebrity. Since 1789, which brought to light in a few months no fewer than 140 political journals, every successive revolution has had the effect of throwing literature into the shade. The revolution of 1871 did not differ in this respect from its predecessors, and as that revolution was prolonged in an acute state until the year 1877, it is not remarkable that the French press of to-day should be still absorbed by political discussion which literary men are inclined to consider idle. Literary criticism has then, to a great extent, been crowded out by politics, but, as the public still takes a great interest in literary questions, the subject has been taken up by the chroniclers and the reporters, who talk more about the author than about the book. Literary criticism has become, so to speak, anecdotic and biographical. The appearance of a new novel by Alphonse Daudet, for instance, is preceded by a series of articles describing the author's childhood, his home, his way of working, his future projects, &c., but when once the book is published the press ceases to concern itself about it. In short, like dramatic criticism, literary reporting—for it cannot be called criticism—turns to anecdotes, trivialities, *racontars*, what the French call *informations*. In both cases the reasons of the transformations are much the same. The writer who treats of books or plays must take into careful consideration his own interests as well as the proverbial irritability of authors and the vanity of actors. The signature at the foot of his article does not allow him to take refuge behind the editorial 'we,' and the absence of that 'we' renders it impossible to obtain unity in a French journal, where each individual writer is all the time stepping out of the ranks. On the other hand, *réclame* and *camaraderie* have been carried to such a pitch that the public, or at any rate the Parisian public, are no longer deceived: they know very well that such and such a manager whose 'incomparable ability' is celebrated in the newspapers every morning is on the verge of bankruptcy, and that X., whose new novel is loudly proclaimed to be 'a masterpiece of Parisian wit and clever observation,' will not succeed in selling a hundred copies.

The *faits divers*, or 'local news,' is one of the most wretchedly conducted departments of a French newspaper. The so-called 'reporter' is a fantastic and utterly unconscious creature, who is a disgrace to the name that he has borrowed. The reporter gravitates between the Morgue, the Central Market, the home for

lost dogs, and the Prefecture of Police; he writes paragraphs on runaway horses, street accidents, suicides, infanticides. When none of these events happen in the course of the day, he invents them without scruple. He is a great stylist, and his prose is full of ingenious tropes. To lose a son is 'to be smitten in one's dearest affections.' The mother 'wild with grief' is reserved for the cases of little children crushed to death or burnt in their beds, 'another accident caused by lucifer matches!' The 'horrible event' or 'dreadful catastrophe' which the reporter narrates invariably 'plunges several families in grief,' or 'spreads desolation over a whole district.' If a colossal pumpkin makes its appearance in the market, he will tell you that 'an English lord has offered a thousand francs for it.' How many times in the course of the year does the reader come across that old old friend, the account of a dog 'presenting all the symptoms of hydrophobia,' who was rushing through such and such a street, 'spreading terror in his path,' until he was killed by the cutlass of a courageous policeman! This is the style of the old-fashioned reporter at three sous a line, who supplies 'flimsy' simultaneously to half a dozen journals. Most of these *faits divers* are purely imaginary, and when they do happen to be true, they are inexact and at least a week old. All the Paris journals publish more or less of these *faits divers*, but some half-dozen of them keep one or two 'reporters à l'Américaine,' with a staff of subalterns under them. The 'reporter à l'Américaine' has a speciality of interviewing the celebrity of the hour, of wresting secrets from diplomatists and statesmen, and of bribing the valets of kings *en voyage* to tell him what the monarchs eat for breakfast. The 'reporter à l'Américaine' doubtless arrives at a certain number of interesting facts, but his prose is utterly untrustworthy and too full of his own personality to be practical. The whole system of reporting and news-gathering is trivial. There is not a single Parisian journal that gives an adequate and thoroughly unbiased report of a political meeting. As for rapidity in publishing news, it is out of the question. A catastrophe happens at Lyons, say on Monday morning, the Havas Telegraphic Agency receives a despatch of ten lines, 'Figaro' sends down its 'reporter à l'Américaine,' and in the 'Figaro' of Tuesday we read 'Terrible Catastrophe at Lyons. By telegraph. I arrived here to find the whole city in desolation. The latest reports mention twenty killed and 300 wounded. Full details to-morrow. Pierre Giffard.' In the 'full

details' that finally come to hand in Wednesday's paper, the 'reporter à l'Américaine' will infallibly tell the reader that he dined with the prefect, 'whose charming wife is an admirable musician,' and that the beds in the Lyons hotels are infested by insects! After all there is a simple explanation of the continuance of journalism of this kind: the French reader seeks two things in a newspaper—amusement and news—and he perhaps prefers the former to the latter. In his eyes the journalist is a sort of mountebank of the pen, and the stranger his antics the more droll he deems him.

The judicial and parliamentary reporting is superior to the kind of work just described. But it is characteristic of the people to find that both the law courts and the legislative chambers are regarded as sources of amusement almost like the theatre or the circus. The judicial reporter dresses up his chronicle in the gayest and most flippant manner, and notices by preference cases that present a scandalous, comic, or curious side. The parliamentary reporting is generally very well done, from the point of view adopted. Those who need a complete shorthand report of the proceedings must have recourse to the 'Journal Officiel'; the ordinary political journal gives only brief editorial comment and condensed reports of the proceedings of the Senate and Chamber, with or without extracts from the speeches, and an anecdotic chronicle of the political day, together with odd scraps of political news. The parliamentary reports of the 'Figaro' are done by Albert Millaud, one of the cleverest wits of the day, and two or three assistants. They form an almost exact counterpart of the theatrical reports already described—a happy mixture of fact, criticism, anecdote, and malice.

The financial column is the principal source of weakness in the French newspapers, almost without exception; it opens the door to that corruption which spreads, with greater or less intensity, from the first page to the last, in the shape of direct or indirect 'puffs,' and more particularly of financial 'puffs.' A newspaper cannot be founded without money, and, as many journalists know to their cost, the capitalist very often not only furnishes the funds, but also interferes in the editing of his paper. Without entering into the reasons—often mysterious, not to say inexplicable—which induce people to start new journals, it may be stated generally that in France, at the present day, large private interests have two powerful levers, the one backing up the other, and that the combination of politics and finance enables the Robert

Macaires of the day to fleece the public with greater facility. Nearly all the daily political papers are either virtually the property of financiers or banking establishments, or else they farm out their financial column to such individuals or companies; and the subvention thus obtained is one of their most important sources of revenue. One journal is said to have received from a bank 150,000 francs a year as the rent of a daily Bourse article of 100 lines, a whole page in the weekly supplement of the journal, 8,000 lines of 'puffs' a year, and the insertion of circulars in the wrapper of the journal four times a year. Furthermore, the Bank had the right to have articles on financial subjects inserted on the first page of the paper at the rate of 30 francs a line, on the second page at the rate of 20 francs a line, and had also absolute and exclusive control over everything concerning finance that was printed in the paper. Every journal in France, both Parisian and provincial, is hampered by some contract similar to the specimen just mentioned, and the taint of this corruption seems to affect the whole journal.

Even art and dramatic critics whose names are an authority with the general public are notoriously open to bribes and *pots-de-vin*. The Parisians, or, at least, the Parisians who are in the movement, are perfectly aware of this state of affairs; the artists know well enough that X. has been *éreinté* by the famous critic W., because he took no notice of an intimation of the latter that a finished sketch would be found acceptable; but, with that cowardice that the Parisians show as regards any prominent person whose name is cited amongst the celebrities of the 'tout Paris,' they set an example of tolerance in these matters that does little credit to their energy. The instances of corruption in financial matters are innumerable. It is needless to add that the 'puffs,' *réclames*, and articles inserted in the French newspapers on such conditions are full of lies and of misrepresentations. The editors of the journals know this to be the case; they know that they are wittingly deceiving the public; but they are powerless to protest, or even to put in the warning letters *Advt.* at the end of the article. The 'puffs' appear in the text of the journal as if emanating from and expressing the opinion of the journal itself. To such an extent has this corruption been carried, that where, twenty years ago, a hundred thousand francs would have sufficed to advertise a new company, a million would now be insufficient. Several times these facts have been brought under the attention of the Chamber

of Deputies ; but the interests of the newspapers, of the financiers, and of the Deputies themselves are so intimately connected, and all are so mutually dependent upon each other, that no result can be arrived at. On the occasion of the discussion of the new press law, in February 1881, M. Sourigues made a very important speech on these scandalous abuses ; but only a few journals ventured even to mention the fact, and most of them, by a discreet silence, did their best to nullify the honourable Deputy's efforts for the public good ! As it is, the utmost that the most influential Parisian journals can do is to keep the 'puffs' within reasonable limits. As for the provincial journals they are entirely at the mercy of the great Parisian financial and speculative companies. From the journalistic point of view independence is thus rendered impossible ; but there is a still higher point of view, the neglect of which reflects discredit on the whole French newspaper press. This view is set forth in the following words of Henri Rochefort : 'When I founded "La Lanterne," ' he says, 'in 1868, I peremptorily refused all propositions for advertisements. Later, when the "Marseillaise" was started, the circulation of which in a few days exceeded 150,000, it was agreed that no financial "puffs" should ever enter its pages. . . . We preferred, my staff and myself, to deprive the journal of considerable perquisites *rather than to participate, even unconsciously, in the possible ruin of some of our fellow-citizens.*'

As regards the *roman-feuilleton* which still continues to occupy the foot of the page, or what is called the *rez-de-chaussée* of French newspapers, it must be stated that the conditions have completely changed. Forty years ago, as we have seen above, the invention had a great success ; but nowadays times have changed. Journalism has assumed formidable dimensions in certain directions, and an insatiable curiosity has been awakened amongst the public. The *feuilleton* is no longer the *raison d'être* of the newspaper ; the main interest of the publication is no longer merely at the foot of the page, but in the columns of the journal itself, in the home and foreign news, and above all in the discussion and commenting of the events and questions of the day. On the other hand, the great masters, the initiators of the *roman-feuilleton*, have disappeared or grown old, and the new writers, the men of the school of Flaubert and De Goncourt, the *romanciers-naturalistes*, as Zola styles them, produce works that do not easily take the form of chapters continued from day to day.

They do not cultivate that happy suspension of the interest at some dramatic point which constituted half the science of the *feuilletonistes*. Furthermore, the book-trade has acquired a magnitude hitherto unprecedented, and the public prefers to read the modern novel in a volume rather than in daily chapters. In that case, it may be asked, why should not the *feuilleton* be suppressed? It appears that the women still demand a daily slice of fiction, and it is the women who decide beyond appeal whether the subscription to a journal is to be renewed or not. The subscribers being, for the majority of French journals, quite as important as the outside purchasers, if not more so, the support of the women is indispensable. In France it is the rule to subscribe to a journal rather than to buy it at a news-stall—a fact due to the legislation on *colportage*, which until quite recently had the effect of seriously limiting the public sale of newspapers and periodicals. The newspapers, therefore, still continue to publish *feuilletons*, and even the novels of Zola, Alphonse Daudet, and Edmond de Goncourt are forced into the ungrateful mould of ‘la suite à demain.’ When the ‘Voltaire’ published Edmond de Goncourt’s ‘La Faustin’ it spent some 60,000 francs in advertising, although the publication probably did not increase the circulation of the journal at all. If you ask the editors why they cut up the works of Alphonse Daudet into *feuilletons*, without any prospect of gaining thereby, they will reply that the publication is honourable to the journal and gives it a high literary renown. To this argument there is no reply to be made. It is a proof, if proof were needed, that the French public is by no means indifferent to the literary battles that have been waged of late years. But apart from the *romanciers-naturalistes*, who only accept the hospitality of the *feuilleton* because they need money like the rest of mankind, there are still novelists who write exclusively for the *rez-de-chaussée* of newspapers. These writers are to be counted by the score, but their work is worse than mediocre; it has nothing to do with literature. A certain portion of the public require, morning and evening, a certain sum of romantic adventures, crimes, bloodshed, and love-making; and there are manufacturers of ‘copy’ who furnish this merchandise as others furnish cheese or butcher’s meat. Most of the *romanciers-feuilletonistes* have no reputation; but some arrive at a veritable popularity, and exercise an incontestable influence on the public. None of the living writers can be compared to Dumas, to Eugène Sue, or

to Ponson du Terrail; still the names of Xavier de Montépin, Fortuné de Boisgobey, Emile Richebourg, and Alexis Bouvier have the faculty of attracting fresh readers to the journals that publish their works. Emile Richebourg, especially, has captivated a certain public by sentimental romances, full of tears, affection, and devotion. The appearance of a new novel by this author in the 'Petit Journal' caused an increase in the circulation of no less than 50,000 copies. It may be remarked, in passing, that the novels which have a success in *feuilletons* have but a small sale when published in volumes, whereas the reverse is the case with the literary novels, which generally go through a large number of editions. Some of Zola's works, for instance, that have had but little success when published in *feuilletons*, have attained a hundredth edition, each edition numbering a thousand copies.

Owing to the absence of regular business buildings in Paris the newspapers are wretchedly lodged. The editorial rooms are rarely large enough to 'swing a cat' in, and the composing room is generally a cellar. Most of the Parisian journals are printed in one of three great central printing works. In short, the average French journal is a comparatively cheap affair in all senses of the word. The fitting up is cheap; the amount of composition—never more than four pages, including the advertisements—is small; and the paper and ink employed are of very inferior quality. The material cost of getting out 20,000 copies of the large-size Parisian four-page journal, including paper, composition, printing, gas, rent, and wear and tear, is as near as possible 1,250 francs.

The editorial expenses are not so easy to estimate. The pay varies very much with the journals, and, owing to the custom of signing, individual writers, who have acquired great celebrity, are paid at exceptional rates, like famous tenors and golden-mouthed *cantatrices*. The regular staff of the 'Figaro,' the most numerous, is composed of twenty-five persons. The pay of the celebrities of the *chronique*, like Albert Wolff, Scholl, and Monselet, is 1,500 francs a month for one or two articles a week. The leading reporter of the 'Figaro' receives the same sum, together with handsome travelling expenses. In short, the small fry of journalists earn from 200 to 500 francs a month, while the leading writers—say, at the outside, twenty men—will make an average of 25,000 francs a year out of their pen. M. Francisque Sarcey, the leading

dramatic *feuilletoniste*, receives 250 francs for each of his weekly reviews in 'Le Temps.' The general tariff for a special article is 150 francs, and the highest price paid to the dozen leaders of the Parisian press is 250 francs. The weekly Parisian letter in the 'Indépendance Belge,' which can almost be reckoned amongst the Parisian journals, is paid 150 francs. The price paid for the *roman-feuilleton* varies very considerably, from two sous a line to thirty sous. Thirty sous a line was the price paid to Alphonse Daudet for his last novel, 'L'Evangéliste,' but it is an altogether exceptional figure; few writers are paid more than eight sous.

Telegraphing expenses and foreign correspondence do not form a large item in the budget of a Parisian journal. Very little telegraphing is done, and what foreign correspondence they publish is, with few exceptions, intermittent, and often voluntary. The business and publishing departments of the French journals are not very extensive, and all the advertising in the principal political journals is in the hands of three great companies which are associated for the joint administration of financial and industrial advertisements in the Parisian and provincial journals.

The history of the laws that have been passed in France with regard to the press during the present century would fill several volumes. The subject is one of the most complicated that could be imagined, and at last the decrees, ordinances, laws, and edicts became so numerous, so contradictory, and so obscure, that no lawyer even pretended to be able to expound them. It suffices to say that until 1881 liberty of the press was unknown in France, and every journal treating of politics or political economy was bound to fulfil many tiresome formalities, to obtain certain authorisations, and to deposit a large sum as caution money. In July 1881 a new press law was promulgated, by virtue of which the publication and sale of newspapers is practically free, most of the formalities have been abolished, and the deposit of caution money is no longer required. The new law, however, contains no fewer than seventy articles, surely a strangely diffuse way of proclaiming liberty of the press!

In France, and particularly in Paris, scarcely a week passes that does not witness the birth, and often the death, of one or more newspapers. The statistics as to the number and circulation of the French journals are therefore constantly varying. Nevertheless it is possible to give approximately correct figures that will serve to show the development of the newspaper press in this

great country with its thirty-nine millions of inhabitants. In the autumn of 1882 the number of periodical publications of all descriptions in France amounted in round numbers to 3,000, out of which number Paris claimed 1,290, and the provinces 1,710. In Paris there are published about 120 periodical publications, daily or weekly newspapers or reviews treating of politics and social economy; in the provinces the number of similar publications amounts to about 800, that is to say, in all, 920. The political journal that has the largest circulation is a one-sou journal, 'Le Petit Journal,' which prints between 620,000 and 650,000 copies. The political journal that has the smallest circulation is 'Le Vigilant,' a Republican journal published at Sedan, which publishes less than a hundred copies a day. At the present moment nearly seventy daily political journals appear at Paris, some sixteen of which are small five-centime journals of the type of the 'Petit Journal'; the rest are four-page papers like the 'Figaro,' varying in price from five to fifteen centimes, the usual price being fifteen centimes. No eight-page journal has ever succeeded in France. The last attempt to found one was made in 1879, in 'Le Globe,' which endeavoured to be a regular newspaper full of news and reading matter of a serious description. 'Le Globe' proved an utter failure, and at the end of a year it was transformed into a four-page journal of the approved type. The average daily circulation of all the daily papers published in Paris is a little under two millions of copies. Next to 'Le Petit Journal,' the journal that has the largest circulation is 'La Petite République Française,' with 160,000 to 170,000 copies.¹ The 'Figaro' has a circulation of about 80,000 copies; 'Le Temps' 25,000 to 30,000; the venerable 'Journal des Débats' about 8,000; 'L'Intransigeant' an average of 35,000; the old 'Constitutionnel,' which before and after 1830 had the then enormous circulation of 20,000 copies, has sunk now to about 2,000, and is still conducted on the old principle for the benefit of a few aged and faithful *abonnés*. Of the provincial journals the 'Petit Lyonnais' has the largest circulation, with a daily average of 73,000 copies; then follow the 'Petit Marseillais' with 57,000, and the 'Lyon Républicain' with 52,000. The number and the circulation of the Republican journals of all

¹ The death of M. Gambetta has caused a considerable decline in the circulation both of the 'République Française' and of the 'Petite République.' The above figures were approximately exact in the autumn of last year, at which time these two journals were the accredited organs of that great political leader.

shades is more than three times as great as the number and circulation of all the Legitimist, Catholic, Orleanist, and Bonapartist sheets put together. Furthermore, the sixteen or seventeen five-centime journals published in Paris have together a larger circulation than all the other large-sized papers. They print daily considerably over a million of copies.

From a commercial point of view, although not to be compared with the press of England, of the United States, or even of Germany, newspaper property in France is nevertheless a very good investment. In the present article nothing can be said about the weekly illustrated press—very inferior, it is true, but very profitable. As regards the daily newspapers, two or three instances may be cited. ‘Figaro’ 500 franc shares have been doubled four times, and are now quoted at 920 francs, which represents for original holders 3,860 francs. ‘L’Univers,’ the leading Catholic journal, pays a dividend of more than 20 per cent.; the ‘République Française’ pays about 10 per cent.; the ‘Petite République’ 26 per cent. Since 1877 the ‘XIX. Siècle’ has paid a dividend of from 58 to 70 per cent.

As compared with the Anglo-Saxon nations the French are not a reading people. Reviews or magazines, such as exist by the dozen in England or America, find great difficulty in obtaining support in France. When you have mentioned the old ‘Revue des Deux Mondes,’ the ‘Correspondant,’ and the ‘Nouvelle Revue,’ all dead-alive publications, the list of general and literary magazines is about exhausted. On the other hand, while refusing to read long and solid articles, the French public is ready to absorb any quantity of light newspaper reading, provided it be served up in such a manner as to suit the national taste, and in such quantities as tradition and long usage have shown to be within the capacity of the Gallic newspaper appetite. From the Anglo-Saxon point of view the average French newspaper is deficient in news. Alluding partly to the fact that French papers, in order to satisfy their provincial subscribers, generally bear a date twenty-four hours in advance of their actual appearance, a wit once observed, that in France the newspapers are published to-morrow and contain the news of the day before yesterday. Certainly the French do not live at high pressure; they transact their business slowly and tranquilly; they move slowly, and they are much given to ‘loafing’ and lounging. The verb *flâner* has no equivalent in any other language. If the French are contented with

their press it is probably because it is such as they desire it to be. In all those points which we Anglo-Saxons are wont to consider essential to the excellence of a newspaper the French press is very deficient; on the other hand, in brightness, literary excellence, and wit, it is perhaps superior to the press of any other country. Of late years there has been a swarming growth of political journals; but, on the other hand, literary men are welcomed in the new journals. Three or four papers bid against each other for the honour of publishing the novels of Edmond de Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, and Emile Zola, while Renan, About, Jules Soury, Mézières, Daudet, J. J. Weiss, Legouvé, Théodore de Banville, and a dozen other veterans are still active contributors to the best French newspapers, and it is in the newspapers, and, above all, in the various developments of the *chronique*, that the men of the younger generation are making their names familiar to the public. Journalism, with all its shortcomings, and in spite of its changed conditions, is still the great school of French literature now, as it has been for the last sixty years.

THE GIANT'S ROBE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'VICE VERSA.'

'Now does he feel his title
Hang loose upon him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.'—*Macbeth*.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE FOG.



ARK was roused from his reverie in the railway carriage by the fact that the train, after slackening speed rather suddenly, had come to a dead standstill. 'Surely we can't be in already,' he said to himself, wondering at the way in which his thoughts had outstripped the time. But on looking out he found that he was mistaken—they were certainly not near the metropolis as yet, nor did they appear to have stopped at any station, though from the

blank white fog which reigned all around, and drifted in curling wreaths through the window he had let down, it was difficult to make very sure of this.

Along the whole length of the train conversation, no longer drowned by the motion, rose and fell in a kind of drone, out of which occasional scraps of talk from the nearer carriages were more distinctly audible, until there came a general lull as each party gave way to the temptation of listening to the other—for the dullest talk has an extraordinary piquancy under these circumstances, either because the speakers, being unseen, appeal to

our imagination, or because they do not suppose that they are being so generally overheard.

But by-and-by it seemed to be universally felt that the stoppage was an unusual one, and windows went down with a clatter along the carriages while heads were put out inquiringly. Every kind of voice demanded to be told where they were, and why they were stopping, and what the deuce the Company meant by it— inquiries met by a guard, who walked slowly along the line, with the diplomatic evasiveness which marks the official dislike to admit any possible hitch in the arrangements.

‘Yes,’ he said, stolidly; ‘there might be a bit of a stoppage like ; they’d be going on presently ; he couldn’t say how long that would be ; something had gone wrong with the engine ; it was nothing serious ; he didn’t exactly know what.’

But he was met just under Mark’s window by the guard from the break at the end of the train, when a hurried conference took place, in which there was no stolidity on either side. ‘Run back as quick as you can and set the detonators—there ain’t a minute to lose, she may be down on us any time, and she’ll never see the other signals this weather. I’d get ‘em all out of the train if I was you, mate—they ain’t safe where they are as it is, that they ain’t !’

The one guard ran back to his break, and then on to set the fog-signals, while the other went to warn the passengers. ‘All get out ’ere, please ; all get out !’ he shouted.

There was the usual obstructive person in the train who required to be logically convinced first of the necessity for disturbing himself ; he put his head angrily out of a window near Mark’s: ‘Here, guard !’ he shouted importantly ; ‘what’s all this ? Why am I to get out ?’ ‘Because you’d better,’ said the guard, shortly. ‘But why—where’s the platform ? I insist on being taken to a platform—I’m not going to break my leg getting out here.’ Several people, who had half opened their doors, paused on the steps at this, as if recalled to a sense of their personal dignity. ‘Do as you please, sir,’ said the official ; ‘the engine’s broke down, and we may be run into any minute in this fog ; but if you’d be more comfortable up there——’ There was no want of alacrity after that, the obstructive man being the first down ; all the rosy-faced gentlemen hopped out, some of the younger ones still grasping half-played hands of ‘Nap’ or ‘Loo,’ and made the best of their way down the embankment, and

several old ladies were got out in various stages of flutter, narrowly escaping sprained ankles in the descent.

Mark, who had seen his opportunity from the first, had rushed to the door of the next compartment, caught Dolly in his arms as



she jumped down, and, hardly believing in his own good fortune, held Mabel's hand in his for one happy moment as she stepped from the high and awkward footboard.

'Down the slope, quick,' he cried to them; 'get as far from the line as you can in case of a smash.'

Mabel turned a little pale, for she had not understood till then that there was any real danger. 'Keep close to me, Dolly,' she said, as they went down the slope; 'we're safe here.'

The fog had gathered thick down in the meadows, and nothing could be seen of the abandoned train when they had gone a few paces from the foot of the embankment; the passengers were moving about in excited groups, not knowing what horrors they might not be obliged to witness in the next few minutes. The excitement increased as one of them declared he could hear the noise of an approaching train. 'Only just in time—God help them if they don't pull up!' cried some, and a woman hoped that 'the poor driver and stoker were not on the engine.'

Dolly heard this and broke from Mabel with a loud cry—'Mabel, we've left Frisk!' she sobbed; 'he'll be killed—oh, my dog will be killed—he mustn't be left behind!'

And, to Mark's horror, she turned back, evidently with the idea of making for the point of danger; he ran after her and caught the little silver-grey form fast in his arms. 'Let me go!' cried Dolly, struggling; 'I must get him back—oh, I must!'

'He'll have jumped out by this time—he's quite safe,' said Mark in her ear.

'He was sound asleep in his basket, he'll never wake if I don't call to him—why do you hold me? I tell you I *will* go!' persisted Dolly.

'No, Dolly, no,' said Mabel, bending over her; 'it's too late—it's hard to leave him, but we must hope for the best.' She was crying, too, for the poor doomed dog as she spoke.

Mark was hardly a man from whom anything heroic could be very confidently expected; he was no more unselfish than the generality of young men; as a rule he disliked personally inconveniencing himself for other people, and in cooler moments, or without the stimulus of Mabel's presence, he would certainly have seen no necessity to run the risk of a painful death for the sake of a dog.

But Mabel was there, and the desire of distinguishing himself in her eyes made a temporary hero out of materials which at first sight were not promising. He was physically fearless enough, and given to acting on impulses without counting the consequences; the impulse seized him now to attempt to rescue this dog, and he obeyed it blindly.

'Wait here,' he said to Mabel; 'I'll go back for him.'

'Oh, no—no,' she cried; 'it may cost you your life!'

'Don't stop him, Mabel,' entreated Dolly; 'he is going to save my dog.'

Mark had gone already, and was half-way up the slope, slippery as it was, with the grass clumped and matted together by the frost, and scored in long brown tracks by the feet that had just descended it.

Mabel was left to console and encourage the weeping Dolly as best she might, with a terrible suspense weighing on her own heart the while, not altogether on Frisk's account. At the point where the train had broken down, the line took a bold curve, and now they could hear, apparently close upon them, the roar of a fast train sweeping round through the fog; there were some faint explosions, hoarse shouting, a long screeching whistle,—and after that the dull shock of a collision; but nothing could be seen from where they stood, and for some moments Mabel remained motionless, almost paralysed by the fear of what might be hidden behind the fog curtain.

Mark clambered painfully up the glistening embankment, hoping to reach the motionless carriages and escape with his object effected before the train he could hear in the distance ground into them with a hideous crash.

He knew his danger but, to do him justice, he scarcely gave it a thought—any possible suffering seemed as remote and inconsiderable just then as the chance of a broken leg or collar-bone had been to him when running for a touchdown in his football days; the one idea that filled his brain was to return to Mabel triumphant with the rescued dog in his arms, and he had room for no others.

He went as directly as he could to the part of the train in which was the carriage he had occupied, and found it without much difficulty when he was near enough to make out forms through the fog; the door of Mabel's compartment was open, and, as he sprang up on the footboard, he heard the train behind rattling down on him with its whistle screeching infernally, and for the first time felt an uneasy recollection of the horribly fantastic injuries described in accounts of so many railway collisions.

But there was no time to think of this; at the other end of the carriage was the little round wicker-basket he had seen in Dolly's hands at the Chigbourne waiting-room, and in it was the terrier, sleeping soundly as she had anticipated. He caught up the little drowsy beast, which growled ungratefully, and turned

to leap down with it to the ballast, when there was a sharp concussion, which sent a jangling forward shock, increasing in violence as it went along the standing train, and threw him violently against the partition of the compartment.

Meanwhile the passengers of the first train, now that the worst was apparently over, and the faint shouts and screams from the embankment had calmed down, began to make their way in the direction of the sounds, and Mabel, holding Dolly fast by the hand, forced herself to follow them, though she was sick and faint with the dread of what she might see.

The first thing they saw was a crowd of eager, excited faces, all questioning and accusing the badgered officials of both trains at the same time. ‘Why was an empty train left on the rails unprotected in this way? they might have been all killed.—It was culpable negligence all round, and there should be an inquiry—they would insist on an inquiry—they would report this to the traffic manager,’ and so on.

The faces looked pale and ghastly enough in the fog, but all the speakers were evidently sound in wind and limb, and, as far as could be seen, neither train had left the rails—but where was the young man who had volunteered to recover the dog? ‘Oh, Mabel,’ cried Dolly, again and again. ‘Frisk is killed, I’m sure of it, or he’d come to me—something has happened—ask, do ask! ’

But Mabel dared not, for fear of hearing that a life had been nobly and uselessly sacrificed; she could only press through the crowd with the object of making her way to the carriage where her suspense would be ended.

‘There’s some one in one of the carriages!’ she heard a voice saying as she got nearer, and her heart beat faster; and then the crowd parted somehow, and she saw Mark Ashburn come out of it towards her, with a dazed, scared smile on his pale face, and the little trembling dog safe under one arm.

Fortunately for Mark, the fog-signals had been set in time to do their work, and the second train was fitted with powerful brakes which, but for the state of the rails, would have brought it to without any collision at all; as it was, the shock had not been severe enough to damage the rolling-stock to any greater extent than twisting or straining a buffer or coupling-chain here and there, though it had thrown him against the corner of the net-rail with sufficient violence to slightly graze his forehead, and leave him stunned and a little faint for a few moments.

After sitting down for a short time to recover himself, he picked up the terrier from the cushions on which it was crouching and shivering, having dropped from his hand at the concussion, and feeling himself still a little giddy and sick, got down amongst the astonished crowd, and came towards Mabel and Dolly as we have seen.

It was the best moment, as he thought afterwards, in his life. Every one, probably, with any imagination at all likes to conceive himself at times as the performer of some heroic action extorting the admiration he longs for from some particular pair of eyes, but opportunities for thus distinguishing oneself are sadly rare nowadays, and often when they come are missed, or, if grasped with success, the fair eyes are looking another way and never see it.

But Mark had a satisfied sense of appearing to the utmost advantage as he met the little girl and placed the dog in her arms. 'There's your dog; he's quite safe, only a little frightened,' he said, with a pleasant sympathy in his voice.

Dolly was too overcome for words; she caught Frisk up with her eyes swimming, and ran away with him to pour her self-reproach and relief into his pricked ears, without making any attempt to express her thanks to his rescuer. Her sister, however, made him ample amends.

'How can we thank you?' she said, with a quiver in her voice and an involuntary admiration in her eyes; 'it was so very, very brave of you—you might have been killed!'

'I thought at first it was going to be rather a bad smash,' said Mark—he could not resist the impulse now to make all the capital he could out of what he had done—'I was knocked down—and—and unconscious for a little while after it; but I'm not much hurt, as you see. I don't *think* I'm any the worse for it, and at all events your little sister's dog isn't—and that's the main point, isn't it?' he added, with a feeling that his words were equal to the occasion.

'Indeed it isn't,' said Mabel warmly; 'if you had been seriously hurt I should never have forgiven myself for letting you go—but are you sure you feel no pain anywhere?'

'Well,' he admitted, 'I fancy I was cut a little about the head' (he was afraid she might not have noticed this), 'but that's a trifle.'

'There is a cut on your forehead,' said Mabel; 'it has been bleeding, but I think it has stopped now. Let me bind it up for you in case it should break out again.'

It was in truth a very small cut, and had hardly bled at all, but Mark made light of it elaborately, as the surest means of keeping her interest alive. ‘I am afraid it must be giving you pain,’ she said, with a pretty, anxious concern in her eyes as she spoke; and Mark protested that the pain was nothing—which was the exact truth, although he had no intention of being taken literally.

They had gone down the embankment again and were slowly crossing the dim field in which they had first taken refuge. No one was in sight, the other passengers being still engaged in comparing notes or browbeating the unhappy guards above; and as Mark glanced at his companion he saw that her thoughts had ceased to busy themselves about him, while her eyes were trying to pierce the gloom which surrounded her.

‘I was looking for my little sister,’ she exclaimed, answering the question in his eyes. ‘She ran off with the dog you brought back to her, and it is so easy to lose oneself here. I must find out where she is—oh, you are ill!’ she broke off suddenly, as Mark staggered and half fell.

‘Only a slight giddiness,’ he said; ‘if—if I could sit down somewhere for a moment—is that a stile over there?’

‘It looks like one. Can you get so far without help?’ she said compassionately. ‘Will you lean on me?’

He seemed to her like some young knight who had been wounded, as it were, in her cause, and deserved all the care she could give him.

‘If you will be so very good,’ said Mark. He felt himself a humbug, for he could have leaped the stile with ease at that very moment. He had very little excuse for practising in this way on her womanly sympathy, except that he dreaded to lose her just yet, and found such a subtle intoxication in being tended like this by a girl from whom an hour ago he had scarcely hoped to win another careless glance; if he exaggerated his symptoms, as it is to be feared he did, there may be some who will forgive him under the circumstances.

So he allowed Mabel to guide him to the stile, and sat down on one of its rotten cross-planks while she poured *eau-de-Cologne* or some essence of the kind on a handkerchief, and ordered him to bathe his forehead with it. They seemed isolated there together on the patch of hoary grass by a narrow black ditch half hidden in rank weeds, which alone could be distinguished in

the prevailing yellowish whiteness, and Mark desired nothing better at that moment.

'I wonder,' said Mabel, 'if there's a doctor amongst the passengers. There must be, I should think. I am sure you ought to see one. Let me see if I can find one and bring him to you.'

But Mark declared he was quite himself again, and would have begged her not to leave him if he had dared; and as there really did not seem to be anything serious the matter, Mabel's uneasiness about Dolly returned. 'I can't rest till I find her,' she said, 'and if you really are strong again, will you help me? She cannot have gone very far.'

Mark, only too glad of any pretence to remain with her, volunteered willingly.

'Then will you go round the field that way,' she said, 'and I will go this, and we will meet here again?'

'Don't you think,' said Mark, who had not been prepared for this, 'that if—she might not know *me*, you see—I mean if I was not with you?'

'Yes, she will,' said Mabel impatiently; 'Dolly won't forget you after what you have done, and we are losing time. Go round by there, and call her now and then; if she is here she will come, and if not then we will try the next field.'

She went off herself as she spoke, and Mark had nothing for it but to obey, as she so evidently expected to be obeyed. He went round the field, calling out the child's name now and then, feeling rather forlorn and ridiculous as his voice went out unanswered on the raw air. Presently a burly figure, grotesquely magnified by the mist, came towards him, and resolved itself into an ordinary guard.

'You one of the gentlemen in my train, sir?' he said, 'the train as broke down, that is?'

'Yes,' said Mark; 'why?'

'Cause we've got the engine put to rights, sir; nothing much the matter with her, there wasn't, and we're goin' on directly, sir; I'm gettin' all my passengers together.'

Mark was in no hurry to leave that field, but his time was not his own; he ought to have been at St. Peter's long ago, and was bound to take the first opportunity of getting back. It would not be pleasant, as it was, to have to go and fetch down his class from the sixth form room, where the head master had probably given them a temporary asylum.

He had never forgotten a morning on which he had overslept himself, and the mortification he had felt at the Doctor's blandly polite but cutting reception of his apologies. He had a better excuse this time, but even that would not bear overtaxing.

He hesitated a moment, however. 'I'll go in a minute,' he said, 'but there's a lady and a little girl with a dog somewhere about. They mustn't be left behind. Wait while I go and tell them, will you?'

'Never you fear, sir,' said the guard, 'we won't go without them, but I'll call 'em; they'll mind me more than they will you, beggin' your pardon, sir, and you'd better run on, as time's short, and keep places for 'em. You leave it all to me; I'll take care on 'em.'

Mark heard faint barks across the hedge in the direction Mabel had taken. The child was evidently found. The best thing, he thought, to do now was to secure an empty compartment, and with that idea, and perhaps a little from that instinctive obedience to anything in a uniform which is a characteristic of the average respectable Englishman, he let himself be persuaded by the guard, and went back to the train.

To his great joy he found that the compartment Mabel had occupied had no one in it; he stood waiting by the door for Mabel and her sister to come up, with eager anticipations of a delightful conclusion to his journey. 'Perhaps she will tell me who she is,' he thought; 'at all events she will ask me who *I* am. How little I hoped for this yesterday!'

He was interrupted by a guard—another guard, a sour-looking man with a grizzled beard, who was in charge of the front van. 'Get in, sir, if you mean to travel by this 'ere train,' he said.

'I'm waiting for a young lady,' said Mark, rather ingenuously, but it slipped out almost without his knowledge. 'The other guard promised me—'

'I don't know nothing about no young ladies,' said the guard obdurately; 'but if you mean my mate, he's just give me the signal from his end, and if you don't want to be left be'ind you'd better take your seat while you can, sir, and pretty sharp, too.'

There was nothing else to do; he could not search for Mabel along the train; he must wait till they got to King's Cross; but he took his seat reluctantly and with a heavy disappointment, thinking what a fool he had been to let himself be persuaded by

the burly guard. ‘But for that, *she* might have been sitting opposite to me now!’ he thought bitterly. ‘What a fool I was to leave her. How pretty she looked when she wanted me to see a doctor; how charming she is altogether! Am I in love with her already? Of course I am; who wouldn’t be? I shall see her again. She will speak to me once more, and, after all, things might be worse. I couldn’t have counted on *that* when we started.’

And he tried to console himself with this, feeling an impatient anger at the slow pace of the train as it crept cautiously on towards the goal of his hopes. But the breakdown had not happened very far from town, and, tedious as the time seemed to Mark, it was not actually long before the colour of the atmosphere (there was no other indication) proved that they were nearing the terminus.

It changed by slow gradations from its original yellow-whiteness to mustard colour, from that to a smoky lurid red, and from red to stinging, choking iron-grey, and the iron-grey pall was in full possession of King’s Cross, where the sickly moonlight of the electric lamps could only clear small halos immediately around their globes.

Mark sprang out before the train had stopped; he strained his eyes in watching for the form he hoped to see there, but in vain; there were no signs in all that bustle of Mabel or Dolly, or the little dog to whom he owed so much.

He sought out the guard who had deluded him and found him superintending the clearing of the luggage-van. He hardly knew whether it was merely a fancy that the official, after making a half-step forward to meet him, and fumbling in all his pockets, turned away again as if anxious to avoid meeting his eye.

Mark forced him to meet it, however, willing or not. ‘Where is the lady?’ he said sharply. ‘You left her behind after all, it seems?’

‘It wasn’t my fault, sir,’ said the guard wheezily, ‘nor it wasn’t the lady’s fault, leastways on’y the little lady’s, sir. Both on us tried all we could, but the little missy, her with the terrier dawg, was narvous-like with it all, and wouldn’t hear of getting in the train again; so the young lady, she said, seeing as they was so near London, they could get a fly or a cab or summat, and go on in that.’

‘And—and did she give you no message for me?’ said Mark. There was such evident expectation in his face that the guard

seemed afraid to disappoint it. ‘I was to give you her dooty,’ he said slowly—‘her dear love I ought to say,’ he substituted quickly, after a glance at Mark’s face, ‘and you was not to be in a way about her, and she’d see you soon at the old place, and—’

‘That’s all a lie, you know,’ said Mark, calmly.

‘Well, then, she didn’t say nothing, if that warn’t it,’ said the guard, doggedly.

‘Did she—did she leave any directions about luggage or anything?’ said Mark.

‘Brown portmancy to go in the left-luggage room till called for,’ said the guard. ‘Anything else I can do for you, sir; no? Good mornin’, then, and thanky, sir! ’

‘Never did such a thing as that in my life afore,’ he muttered, as he went back to his van; ‘to go and lose a bit o’ paper with writing on it, d’reckly I got it, too; I’m afraid my ’ead’s a-leavin’ me; they ain’t keepin’ company, that’s plain. I made a mess o’ that, or he wouldn’t have wanted her direction. *I saw what he was up to—well, they’d make a good-looking pair.* I’m sorry I lost that there paper; but it warn’t no use a-tellin’ of him.’

As for Mark, this lame and impotent conclusion brought back all his depression again. ‘She never even asked my name!’ he thought, bitterly. ‘I risked my life for her—it *was* for her, and she knew it; but she has forgotten that already. I’ve lost her for ever this time; she may not even live in London, and if she did I’ve no clue to tell me where, and if I had I don’t exactly see what use it would be; I won’t think about her—yes, I will, she can’t prevent me from doing that, at any rate!’

By this time he had left the City station of the Metropolitan Railway, and was going back to his underground labours at St. Peter’s, where he was soon engaged in trying to establish something like discipline in his class, which the dark brown fog seemed to have inspired with unaccountable liveliness. His short holiday had not served to rest and invigorate him as much as might have been expected; it had left him consumed with a hopeless longing for something unattainable. His thirst for distinction had returned in an aggravated form, and he had cut himself off now from the only means of slaking it. As that day wore on, and with each day that succeeded it, he felt a wearier disgust with himself and his surroundings.

CHAPTER VIII.

BAD NEWS.



WAS Christmas week, and Mrs. Langton and her daughters were sitting, late one afternoon, in the drawing-room where we saw them first. Dolly was on a low stool at her mother's feet, submitting, not too willingly, to have the bow in her hair smoothed and arranged for her. 'It *must* be all right now, mother!' she said, breaking away rebelliously at last. 'It's worse than ever, Dolly,' said Mrs. Langton plaintively; 'it's slipped over to the left now!' 'But it doesn't matter, it never will keep straight long.' 'Well, if you *like* to run about like a little wild child,' 'Little wild children don't wear bows in their hair; they wear—well, they don't wear anything they've got to be careful and tidy about. I think that must be rather nice,' said Dolly, turning round from where she knelt on the hearthrug. 'Wake up, Frisk, and be good-tempered directly. Mother, on Christmas Day I'm going to tie a Christmas card round Frisk's neck, and send him into papa's dressing-room to wish him a Merry Christmas, the first thing in the morning—you won't tell him before the time, will you?' 'Not if you don't wish it, darling,' said Mrs. Langton, placidly.

'I mightn't have had him to tie a card to,' said Dolly, taking the dog up and hugging him fondly, 'if that gentleman had not fetched him out of the train for me; and I never said "thank you" to him either. I forgot somehow, and when I remembered he was gone. Should you think he will come to see me, Mabel; you told him that mother would be glad to thank him some time, didn't you, on the paper you gave the guard for him?'

'Yes, Dolly,' said Mabel, turning her head a little away; 'but you see he hasn't come yet.'

'My dear,' said her mother, 'really I think he shows better

taste in keeping away; there was no necessity to send him a message at all, and I hope he won't take any advantage of it. Thanking people is so tiresome and, after all, they never think you have said enough about it. It was very kind of the young man, of course, very—though I can't say I ever quite understood what it was he did—it was something in a fog, I know,' she concluded vaguely.

'We told you all about it, mother,' explained Dolly; 'I'll tell you all over again. There was a fog and our train stopped, and we got out, and I left Frisk behind, and there he was in the carriage all alone, and then the gentleman ran back and got him out and brought him to me. And another train came up behind and stopped too.'

'Dolly tells it rather tamely,' said Mabel, her cheeks flushing again. 'At the time he ran back for the dog, we could all hear the other train rushing up in the fog, mamma, and nobody knew whether there might not be a frightful collision in another minute.'

'Then I think it was an extremely rash thing for him to do, my dear; and if I were his mother I should be very angry with him.'

'He was very good-looking, wasn't he, Mabel?' said Dolly, irrelevantly.

'Was he, Dolly? Well, yes, I suppose he was, rather,' said Mabel, with much outward indifference, and an inward and very vivid picture of Mark's face as he leaned by the stile, his fine eyes imploring her not to leave him.

'Well, perhaps he doesn't care about being thanked, or doesn't want to see us again,' said Dolly; 'if he did, he'd call, you know; you wrote the address on the paper.'

Mabel had already arrived at the same conclusion, and was secretly a little piqued and hurt by it; she had gone slightly out of her way to give him an opportunity of seeing her again if he wished, and he had not chosen to take advantage of it; it had not seriously disturbed her peace of mind, but her pride was wounded notwithstanding. At times she was ready to believe that there had been some mistake or miscarriage with her message, otherwise it was strange that the admiration which it had not been difficult to read in his eyes should have evaporated in this way.

'Why, here's papa—home already!' cried Dolly, as the door opened and a tall man entered. 'How do you do, papa? you've

rumped my bow—you didn't think I *meant* it, did you? you can do it again if you like—I don't mind a bit; mother does.'

He had duly returned the affectionate hug with which Dolly had greeted him, but now he put her aside with a rather pre-occupied air, and went to his wife's chair, kissing the smooth forehead she presented, still absently.

'You are early, Gerald,' she said; 'did the courts rise sooner to-day?'

'No,' he said conscientiously, 'it's the Vacation now—I left chambers as soon as I could get away,' and he was folding and unfolding the evening paper he had brought in with him, as he stood silent before the fire.

Mr. Langton was not much over fifty, and a handsome man still, with full clear eyes, a well-cut chin and mouth, iron-grey whiskers, and a florid complexion which years spent in stifling law-courts and dust and black laden chambers had not done much to tone down. Young barristers' and solicitors' clerks were apt to consider him rather a formidable personage in Lincoln's Inn; and he was certainly imposing as he rustled along New Square or Chancery Lane, his brows knitted, a look of solemn importance about his tightly-closed lips, and his silk gown curving out behind him like a great black sail. He had little imperious ways in court, too, of beckoning a client to come to him from the well, or of waving back a timid junior who had plucked his gown to draw his attention to some suggestion with a brusque 'Not now—I can't hear that now!' which suggested immeasurable gulfs between himself and them. But at home he unbent, a little consciously, perhaps, but he did unbend—being proud and fond of his children, who at least stood in no fear of him. Long years of successful practice had had a certain narrowing effect upon him; the things of his profession were always foremost in his mind now, and when he travelled away from them he was duller than he once promised to be—his humour had slowly dwindled down until he had just sufficient for ordinary professional purposes, and none at all for private consumption.

In his favour it may be added that he was genial to all whom he did not consider his inferiors, a good though not a demonstrative husband; that, as a lawyer, he was learned without the least pedantry; and that he was a Bencher of his Inn, where he frequently dined, and a Member of Parliament, where he never spoke, even on legal matters.

Mabel's quick eyes were the first to notice a shade on his face and a constraint in his manner ; she went to his side and said in an undertone, ' You are not feeling ill, papa, are you, or has anything worried you to-day ? '

' I am quite well. I have news to tell you presently,' he said in the same tone.

' Come and see my Christmas cards before I do them up,' said Dolly from a side-table ; ' I'm going to send one to each of my friends, except Clara Haycraft, or if I do send her one,' she added thoughtfully, ' it will be only a penny one, and I shall write her name on the back so that she can't use it again. Clara has not behaved at all well to me lately. If I sent one to Vincent now, papa, would he get it in time ? '

' No—no,' said her father, a little sharply ; ' and look here, Pussy, run away now and see how Colin is getting on.'

' And come back and tell you ? ' inquired Dolly ; ' very well, papa.'

' Don't come back till I send for you,' he said. ' Mind that now, Dolly, stay in the schoolroom.'

He shut the door carefully after her, and then, turning to his wife and daughter, he said, ' You haven't either of you seen the papers to-day, I suppose ? '

' No,' said Mrs. Langton ; ' you know I never read daily papers. Gerald,' she cried suddenly, with a light coming into her eyes, ' is another judge dead ? ' Visions of her husband on the Bench, a town-house in a more central part of London, an increase of social consideration for herself and daughters, began to float into her brain.

' It's not that—if there was, I'm not likely to be offered a judgeship just yet ; it's not good news, Belle, I'm afraid it's very bad,' he said warningly, ' very bad indeed.'

' Oh, papa,' cried Mabel, ' please don't break it to us—tell it at once, whatever it is ! '

' You must let me choose my own course, my dear ; I am coming to the point at once. The "Globe" has a telegram from Lloyd's agent reporting the total loss of the "Mangalore."'

' Vincent's ship ! ' said Mabel. ' Is—is he saved ? '

' We cannot be certain of anything just yet—and—and these disasters are generally exaggerated in the first accounts, but I'm afraid there is very grave reason to fear that the poor boy went down with her—not many passengers were on board at the time,

and only four or five of them were saved, and they are women. We can hope for the best still, but I cannot after reading the particulars feel any confidence myself. I made inquiries at the owner's offices this afternoon, but they could tell me very little just yet, though they will have fuller information by to-morrow—but from what they did say I cannot feel very hopeful.'

Mabel hid her face, trying to realise that the man who had sat opposite to her there scarcely a month ago, with the strange, almost prophetic, sadness in his eyes, was lying somewhere still and white, fathoms deep under the sea—she was too stunned for tears just yet.

'Gerald,' said Mrs. Langton, 'Vincent is drowned—I'm sure of it. I feel this will be a terrible shock to me by-and-by; I don't know when I shall get over it—poor, poor dear fellow! To think that the last time I saw him was that evening we dined at the Gordons'—you remember, Gerald, a dull dinner—and he saw me into the carriage, and stood there on the pavement saying good-bye!' Mrs. Langton seemed to consider that these circumstances had a deep pathos of their own; she pressed her eyes daintily with her handkerchief before she could go on. 'Why didn't he sail by one of the safe lines?' she murmured; 'the P. and O. never lost a single life; he might have gone in one of them and been alive now!'

'My dear Belle,' said her husband, 'we can't foresee these things, it—it *was* to be, I suppose.'

'Is nothing more known?' said Mabel, with a strong effort to control her voice.

'Here is the account—stay, I can give you the effect of it. It was in the Indian Ocean, not long after leaving Bombay, somewhere off the Malabar coast; and the ship seems to have grazed a sunken reef, which ripped a fearful hole in her side, without stopping her course. They were not near enough to the land to hope to reverse the engines and back her on shore at full speed. She began to settle down fast by the head, and their only chance was in the boats, which unfortunately had nearly all become jammed in the davits. Every one appears to have behaved admirably. They managed at last to launch one of the boats, and to put the women into it; and they were trying to get out the others, when the vessel went down suddenly, not a quarter of an hour after striking the reef.'

'Vincent could swim, papa,' said Mabel, with gleaming eyes.

'He was not a first-rate swimmer,' said Mr. Langton, 'I remember that, and even a first-rate swimmer would have found it hard work to reach the shore, if he had not been drawn down with the ship, as seems to have been the fate of most of the poor fellows. Still of course there is always hope.'

'And he is dead! Vincent dead! It seems so hard, so very, very sad,' said Mabel, and began to cry softly.

'Cry, darling,' said Mrs. Langton, 'it will do you good. I'm



sure I wish *I* could cry like that, it would be such a relief. But you know papa says we may hope yet; we won't give up all hope till we're obliged to; we must be brave. You really don't care about coming in to dinner? You won't have a little something sent up to your room? Well, I feel as if food would choke me myself, but I must go in to keep papa company. Will you tell this sad news to Dolly and Colin, and ask Fraulein to keep them with her till bedtime? I can't bear to see them just yet.'

Mr. Langton's decorous concern did not interfere with his

appetite, and Mrs. Langton seemed rather relieved at being able to postpone her grief for the present, and so Mabel was left to break the disaster, and the fate there was too much reason for fear for Vincent, to her younger brother and sister—a painful task, for Holroyd had been very dear to all three of them. Fraulein Mozer, too, wept with a more than sentimental sorrow for the young man she had tried to help, who would need her assistance never again.

The tidings had reached Mark early that same afternoon. He was walking home through the City from some 'holiday-classes' he had been superintending at St. Peter's, when the heading 'Loss of a passenger steamer with —— lives' on the contents-sheets of the evening papers caught his eye, and led him, when established with a 'Globe' in one of the Underground Railway carriages, to turn with a languid interest to the details. He started when he saw the name of the vessel, and all his indifference left him as he hurriedly read the various accounts of the disaster, and looked in vain for Vincent's name amongst the survivors.

The next day he, too, went up to the owners' offices to make inquiries, and by that time full information had come in, which left it impossible that any but those who had come ashore in the long-boat could have escaped from the ship. They had remained near the scene of the wreck for some time, but without picking up more than one or two of the crew; the rest must all have been sucked down with the ship, which sank with terrible suddenness at the last.

Vincent was certainly not amongst those in the boat, while, as appeared from the agent's list, he was evidently on board when the ship left Bombay. It was possible to hope no longer after that, and Mark left the offices with the knowledge that Holroyd and he had indeed taken their last walk together; that he would see his face and take his hand no more.

It came to him with a shock, the unavoidable shock which a man feels when he has suddenly to associate the idea of death with one with whom he has had any intimacy. He told himself he was sorry, and for a moment Vincent's fate seemed somehow to throw a sort of halo round his memory, but very soon the sorrow faded, until at last it became little more than an uneasy consciousness that he ought to be miserable and was not.

Genuine grief will no more come at command than genuine joy, and so Mark found, not without some self-reproach; he even

began to read '*In Memoriam*' again with the idea of making that the keynote for his emotions, but the passionate yearning of that lament was pitched too high for him, and he never finished it. He recognised that he could not think of his lost friend in the way their long intimacy seemed to demand, and solved the difficulty by not thinking of him at all, compounding for his debt of inward mourning by wearing a black tie, which, as he was fond of a touch of colour in his costume, and as the emblem in question was not strictly required of him, he looked upon as, so to speak, a fairly respectable dividend.

Caffyn heard the news with a certain satisfaction. A formidable rival had been swept out of his path, and he could speak of him now without any temptation to depreciate his merits, so much so that when he took an opportunity one day of referring to his loss, he did it so delicately that Mabel was touched, and liked him better for this indication of feeling than she had ever been able to do before.

Her own sorrow was genuine enough, requiring no artificial stimulus and no outward tokens to keep it alive, and if Vincent could have been assured of this it would have reconciled him to all else. No callousness nor forgetfulness on the part of others could have had power to wound him so long as he should live on in the memory of the girl he had loved.

But it is better far for those who are gone that they should be impervious alike to our indifference and our grief, for the truest grief will be insensibly deadened by time, and could not long console the least exacting for the ever-widening oblivion.

CHAPTER IX.

A TURNING-POINT.



ARK came down to the little back parlour at Malakoff Terrace one dull January morning to find the family already assembled there, with the exception of Mrs. Ashburn, who was breakfasting in bed—an unusual indulgence for her.

'Mark,' said Trixie, as she leaned back in her chair, and put up her face for his morn-

ing greeting, 'there's a letter for you on your plate.'

It was not difficult to observe a suppressed excitement amongst all the younger members of his family concerning this letter; they had finished their breakfast and fallen into some curious speculations as to Mark's correspondent before he came in. Now three pairs of eyes were watching him as he strolled up to his seat; Mr. Ashburn alone seemed unconscious or indifferent.

Of late Mark had not had very many letters, and this particular one bore the name of 'Chilton & Fladgate' on the flap of the envelope. The Ashburns were not a literary family, but they knew this as the name of a well-known firm of publishers, and it had roused their curiosity.

Mark read the name too. For a moment it gave him a throb of excitement, the idea coming to him that, somehow, the letter concerned his own unfortunate manuscripts. It was true that he had never had any communication with this particular firm, but these wild vague impressions are often independent of actual fact; he took it up and half began to open it.

Then he remembered what it probably was, and, partly with the object of preserving Vincent's secret still as far as possible, but chiefly, it must be owned, from a malicious pleasure he took in disappointing the expectation he saw around him, put the letter still unopened in his pocket.

'Why don't you open it?' asked Trixie impatiently, who was cherishing the hope that some magnificent literary success had come at last to her favourite brother.

'Manners,' explained Mark, laconically.

'Nonsense,' said Trixie, 'you don't treat us with such ceremony as all that.'

'Not lately,' said Mark; 'that's how it is—it's bad for a family to get lax in these little matters of mutual courtesy. I'm going to see if I can't raise your tone—this is the beginning.'

'I'm sure we're very much obliged to you,' from Martha; 'I'm quite satisfied with my own tone, it's quite high enough for me, thank you.'

'Yes, I forgot,' said Mark, 'I've heard it very high indeed sometimes. I wronged you, Martha. Still, you know, we might (all except *you*, Martha) be more polite to one another without causing ourselves any internal injury, mightn't we?'

'Well, Mark,' said Trixie, 'all you have to do is to ask our leave to open the letter, if you're really so particular.'

'Is that in the Etiquette Book?' inquired Mark.

'Don't be ridiculous—why *don't* you ask our leave?'

'I suppose because I want to eat my breakfast—nothing is so prejudicial, my love, to the furtherance of the digestive process as the habit of reading at meals, any medical man will tell you that.'

'Perhaps,' suggested Martha, 'Mark has excellent reasons for preferring to read his letter alone?'

'Do you know, Martha,' said Mark, 'I really think there's something in that.'

'So do I,' said Martha, 'more than you would care for us to know, evidently; but don't be afraid, Mark, whether it's a bill, or a love-letter, or another publisher's rejection; we don't want to know your secrets—do we, Cuthbert?'

'Very amiable of you to say so,' said Mark. 'Then I shan't annoy you if I keep my letter to myself, shall I? Because I rather thought of doing it.'

‘Eh? doing what? What is Mark saying about a letter?’ broke in Mr. Ashburn. He had a way of striking suddenly like this into conversations.

‘Somebody has written me a letter, father,’ said Mark; ‘I was telling Martha I thought I should read it—presently.’

But even when he was alone he felt in no hurry to possess himself of the contents. ‘I expect it’s the usual thing,’ he thought. ‘Poor Vincent is out of all that now. Let’s see how they let him down!’ and he read:—

‘DEAR SIR,—We have read the romance entitled “Glamour” which you have done us the honour to forward some time since. It is a work which appears to us to possess decided originality and merit, and which may be received with marked favour by the public, while it can hardly fail in any case to obtain a reception which will probably encourage its author to further efforts. Of course, there is a certain risk attending its reception which renders it impossible for us to offer such terms for a first book as may be legitimately demanded hereafter for a second production by the same pen. We will give you . . .’ (and here followed the terms, which struck Mark as fairly liberal for a first book by an unknown author). ‘Should you accept our offer, will you do us the favour to call upon us here at your earliest convenience, when all preliminary matters can be discussed.

‘We are, &c.,

‘CHILTON & FLADGATE.’

Mark ran hurriedly through this letter with a feeling, first of incredulous wonder, then of angry protest against the bull-headed manner in which Fortune had dealt out this favour.

Vincent had been saved the dreary delays, the disappointments and discouragements, which are the lot of most first books; he had won a hearing at once—and where was the use of it? no praise or fame among men could reach him now.

If he had been alive, Mark thought bitterly; if a letter like this would have rescued him from all he detested, and thrown open to him the one career for which he had any ambition, he might have waited for it long and vainly enough. But he began by being indifferent, and, if Fortune had required any other inducement to shower her gifts on him, his death had supplied it.

He chafed over this as he went up to the City, for there was another holiday-class that day at St. Peter's; he thought of it at intervals during the morning, and always resentfully. What increased his irritation above everything was the fact that the publishers evidently regarded *him* as the author of the book, and he would have the distasteful task put upon him of enlightening them.

When the day's duties were over he found himself putting on his hat and coat in company with the Rev. Mr. Shelford, who was also in charge of one of the classes formed for the relief of parents and the performance of holiday work, and the two walked out together; Mark intending to call at once and explain his position to Messrs. Chilton & Fladgate.

'What are you going to do with yourself, Ashburn, now?' said Mr. Shelford in his abrupt way as they went along. 'Going to be a schoolmaster and live on the *crambe repetita* all your life, hey?'

'I don't know,' said Mark sullenly; 'very likely.'

'Take my advice (I'm old enough to offer it unasked); give yourself a chance while you can of a future which won't cramp and sour and wear you as this will. If you feel any interest in the boys—'

'Which I don't,' put in Mark.

'Exactly, which you don't—but if you did—I remember I did once, in some of 'em, and helped 'em on, and spoke to the head-master about 'em, and so on. Well, they'll pass out of your class and look another way when they meet you afterwards. As for the dullards, they'll be always with you, like the poor, down at the bottom like a sediment, sir, and much too heavy to stir up! I can't manage 'em now, and my temper gets the better of me, God forgive me for it, and I say things I'm sorry for and that don't do me or them any good, and they laugh at me. But I've got my parish to look after; it's not a large one, but it acts as an antidote. You're not even in orders, so there's no help for you *that way*; and the day will come when the strain gets too much for you, and you'll throw the whole thing up in disgust, and find yourself forced to go through the same thing somewhere else or begin the world in some other capacity. Choose some line in which hard work and endurance for years will bring you in a more substantial reward than that.'

'Well,' said Mark, for whom this gloomy view of his prospects

reflected his own forebodings, 'I am reading for the Bar. I went up for my call-examination the other day.'

'Ah, is that so? I'm glad to hear of it; a fine profession, sir; constant variety and excitement—for the pleader, that is to say' (Mr. Shelford shared the lay impression that pleading was a form of passionate appeal to judge and jurymen), 'and of course you would plead in court. The law has some handsome



prizes in its disposal, too. But you should have an attorney or two to push you on, they say. Perhaps you can count on that?'

'I wish I could,' said Mark, 'but the fact is my ambition doesn't lie in a legal direction at all. I don't care very much about the Bar.'

'Do you care very much about anything? Does your ambition lie anywhere?'

'Not now; it did once—literature, you know; but that's all over.'

'I remember, to be sure. They rejected that Christmas piece of yours, didn't they? Well, if you've no genuine talent for it, the sooner you find it out the better for you. If you feel you've something inside of you that must out in chapters and volumes, it generally comes, and all the discouragement in the world won't keep it down. It's like those stories of demoniacal possession in the "Anatomy"—you know your Burton, I daresay? Some of the possessed brought "globes of hair" and "such-like baggage" out of themselves, but others "stones with inscriptions." If the demon gets too strong for you, try and produce a stone with a good readable inscription on it—not three globes of hair for the circulating libraries.'

'We shall see,' said Mark laughing. 'I must leave you here. I have an appointment with Chilton & Fladgate just by.'

'Ay, ay,' said the old gentleman, wagging his head; 'publishers, aren't they? Don't tell me your ambition's dead if it's taken you as far as that. But I won't ask any more questions. I shall hope to be able to congratulate you shortly. I won't keep you away from your publishers any longer.'

'They are not my publishers yet,' said Mark; 'they have made me some proposals, but I have not accepted them at present.'

He knew what a false impression this would leave with his companion, bare statement of fact as it was, but he made it deliberately, feeling almost as much flattered by the unconscious increase of consideration in the other's voice and manner as if there had been the slightest foundation for it.

They said good-bye, and the old clergyman went on and was swallowed up in the crowd, thinking as he went, 'Publishing, eh? a good firm, too. I don't think he could afford to do it at his own expense. Perhaps there's more ballast in him after all than I gave him credit for. I can't help liking the young fellow somehow, too. I should like to see him make a good start.'

Mark, having sent his name up by one of the clerks behind the imposing mahogany counters, was shown through various swinging glass doors into a waiting-room, where the magazines and books symmetrically arranged on the table gave a certain flavour of dentistry to the place.

Mark turned them over with a quite unreasonable nervous-

ness, but the fact was he shrank from what he considered the humiliation of explaining that he was a mere agent ; it occurred to him for the first time, too, that Holroyd's death might possibly complicate matters, and he felt a vague anger against his dead friend for leaving him in such a position.

The clerk returned with the message that Mr. Fladgate would be happy to see Mark at once, and so he followed upstairs and along passages with glimpses through open doors of rooms full of clerks and desks, until they came to a certain room into which Mark was shown—a small room with a considerable litter of large wicker trays filled with proofs, packets and rolls of manuscripts of all sizes, and piles of books and periodicals, in the midst of which Mr. Fladgate was sitting with his back to the light, which was admitted through windows of ground-glass.

He rose and came forward to meet Mark, and Mark saw a little reddish-haired and whiskered man, with quick eyes, and a curious perpendicular fold in the forehead above a short, blunt nose, a mobile mouth, and a pleasantly impulsive manner.

'How do you do, Mr. Beauchamp?' he said heartily, using the *nom de plume* with an air of implied compliment ; 'and so you've made up your mind to entrust yourself to us, have you? That's right. I don't think you'll find any reason to regret it, I don't indeed.'

Mark said he was sure of that.

'Well, now, as to the book,' continued Mr. Fladgate ; 'I've had the pleasure of looking through it myself, as well as Mr. Blackshaw, our reader, and I must tell you that I agree with him in considering that you have written a very remarkable book. As we told you, you know, it may or may not prove a pecuniary success, but, however that may be, my opinion of it will remain the same ; it ought, in my judgment, to ensure you a certain standing at once—at once.'

Mark heard this with a pang of jealousy. Long before, he had dreamed of just such an interview, in which he should be addressed in some such manner—his dream was being fulfilled now with relentless mockery !

'But there is a risk,' said Mr. Fladgate, 'a decided risk, which brings me to the subject of terms. Are you satisfied with the offer we made to you ? You see that a first book——'

'Excuse me for one moment,' said Mark desperately, 'I'm afraid you imagine that—that *I* wrote the book ?'

'That certainly was my impression,' said Mr. Fladgate, with a humorous light in his eye; 'the only address on the manuscript was yours, and I came to the not unnatural conclusion that Mr. Ashburn and Mr. Beauchamp were one and the same. Am I to understand that is *not* the case?'

'The book,' said Mark—what it cost him to say this!—'the book was written by a friend of mine, who went abroad some time ago.'

'Indeed? Well, we should prefer to treat with him in person, of course, if possible.'

'It isn't possible,' said Mark, 'my friend was lost at sea, but he asked me to represent him in this matter, and I believe I know his wishes.'

'I've no doubt of it; but you see, Mr.—Mr. Ashburn, this must be considered a little. I suppose you have some authority from him in writing, to satisfy us (merely as a matter of business) that we are dealing with the right person?'

'I have not indeed,' said Mark, 'my friend was very anxious to retain his incognito.'

'He must have been—very much so,' said Mr. Fladgate, coughing; 'well, perhaps you can bring me some writing of his to that effect? You may have it among your papers, eh?'

'No,' said Mark, 'my friend did not think it necessary to give me one—he was anxious to—'

'Oh, quite so—then you can procure me a line or two perhaps?'

'I told you that my friend was dead,' said Mark a little impatiently.

'Ah, so you did, to be sure, I forgot. I thought—but no matter. Well, Mr. Ashburn, if you can't say anything more than this—anything, you understand, which puts you in a position to treat with us, I'm afraid—I'm *afraid* I must ask time to think over this. If your friend is really dead, I suppose your authority is determined. Perhaps, however, his—ahem—anxiety to preserve his incognito has led him to allow this rumour of his death to be circulated?'

'I don't think that is likely,' said Mark, wondering at an undercurrent of meaning in the publisher's tone, a meaning which had nothing sinister in it, and yet seemed urging him to contradict himself for some reason.

'That is your last word, then?' said Mr. Fladgate, and there

was a sharp inflection as of disappointment and irritation in his voice, and the fold in his forehead deepened.

'It must be,' said Mark, rising; 'I have kept you too long already.'

'If you really *must* go,' said Mr. Fladgate, not using the words in their conventional sense of polite dismissal. 'But, Mr. Ashburn, are you quite sure that this interview might not be saved from coming to nothing as it seems about to do? Might not a word or two from you set things right again? I don't wish to force you to tell me anything you would rather keep concealed—but really, this story you tell about a Mr. Vincent Beauchamp who is dead only ties our hands, you understand—ties our hands!'

'If so,' said Mark, uncomfortably, 'I can only say I am very sorry for it—I don't see how I can help it.'

He was beginning to feel that this business of Holroyd's had given him quite trouble enough.

'Now, Mr. Ashburn, as I said before, I should be the last man to press you—but really, you know, *really*—this is a trifle absurd! I think you might be a little more frank with me, I do indeed. There is no reason why you should not trust me!'

Was this man tempting him? thought Mark. Could he be so anxious to bring out this book that he was actually trying to induce him to fabricate some story which would get over the difficulties that had arisen?

As a mere matter of fact, it may be almost unnecessary to mention that no such idea had occurred to worthy Mr. Fladgate, who, though he certainly was anxious to secure the book, if he could, by any legitimate means, was anything but a publishing Mephistopheles. He had an object, however, in making this last appeal for confidence, as will appear immediately; but, innocent as it was, Mark's imagination conjured up a bland demon tempting him to some act of unspeakable perfidy; he trembled—but not with horror. 'What do you mean?' he stammered.

Mr. Fladgate gave a glance of keen amusement at the pale troubled face of the young man before him. 'What do I mean?' he repeated. 'Come, I've known sensitive women try to conceal their identity, and even their sex, from their own publishers; I've known men even persuade themselves they didn't care for notoriety—but such a determined instance of what I must take leave to call the literary ostrich I don't think I ever *did* meet before!

I never met a writer so desperately anxious to remain unknown that he would rather take his manuscript back than risk his secret with his own publisher. But don't you see that you have raised (I don't use the term in the least offensively) the mask, so to speak—you should have sent somebody else here to-day if you wished to keep me in the dark. I've not been in business all these years, Mr. Ashburn, without gaining a little experience. I think, I do think, I am able to know an author when I see him—we are all liable to error, but I am very much mistaken if this Mr. Vincent Beauchamp (who was so unfortunately lost at sea) is not to be recovered alive by a little judicious dredging. Do think if you can't produce him; come, he's not in very deep water—bring him up, Mr. Ashburn, bring him up!'

'You make this very difficult for me,' said Mark, in a low voice; he knew now how greatly he had misjudged the man, who had spoken with such an innocent, amiable pride in his own surprising discernment; he also felt how easy and how safe it would be to take advantage of this misunderstanding, and what a new future it might open to him—but he was struggling still against the temptation so unconsciously held out to him.

'I might retort that, I think. Now be reasonable, Mr. Ashburn. I assure you the writer, whoever he may be, has no cause to be ashamed of the book—the time will come when he will probably be willing enough to own it. Still, if he wishes to keep his real name secret, I tell him, through you, that he may surely be content to trust that to us. We have kept such secrets before—not very long, to be sure, as a general rule; but then that was because the authors usually relieved us from the trouble—the veil was never lifted by us.'

'I think you said,' began Mark, as if thinking aloud, 'that other works by—by the same author would be sure of acceptance?'

'I should be very glad to have an opportunity, in time, of producing another book by Mr. Vincent Beauchamp—but Mr. Beauchamp, as you explained, is unhappily no more. Perhaps these are earlier manuscripts of his?'

Mark had been seized with the desire of making one more attempt, in spite of his promise to his uncle, to launch those unhappy paper ships of his—'Sweet Bells Jangled' and 'One Fair Daughter.' For an instant it occurred to him that he might answer this last question in the affirmative; he had little doubt

that if he did his books would meet with a very different reception from that of Messrs. Leadbitter and Gandy ; still, that would only benefit Holroyd—not himself, and then he recollects, only just in time, that the difference in handwriting (which was very considerable) would betray him. He looked confused and said nothing.

Mr. Fladgate's patience began to tire. ‘We don't seem to be making any way, do we?’ he said, with rather affected pleasantry. ‘I'm afraid I must ask you to come to a decision on this without any more delay. Here is the manuscript you sent us. If the real author is dead, we are compelled to return it with much regret. If you can tell me anything which does away with the difficulty, this is the time to tell it. Of course you will do exactly as you please, but after what you have chosen to tell us we can hardly see our way, as I said, to treat with you without some further explanation. Come, Mr. Ashburn, am I to have it or not?’

‘Give me a little time,’ said Mark faintly, and the publisher, as he had expected, read the signs of wavering in his face, though it was not of the nature he believed it to be.

Mark sat down again and rested his chin on his hand, with his face turned away from the other's eyes. A conflict was going on within him such as he had never been called upon to fight before, and he had only a very few minutes allowed him to fight it.

Perhaps in these crises a man does not always arrange pros and cons to contend for him in the severely logical manner with which I have occasionally found him doing it in print. The forces on the enemy's side can generally be induced to desert. All the advantages which would follow if he once allowed himself to humour the publisher's mistake were very prominently before Mark's mind—the dangers and difficulties kept in the background. He was incapable of considering the matter coolly; he felt an overmastering impulse upon him, and he had never trained himself to resist his impulses for very long. There was very little of logical balancing going on in his brain; it began to seem terribly, fatally easy to carry out this imposition. The fraud itself grew less ugly and more harmless every instant.

He saw his own books, so long kept out in the cold by ignorant prejudice, accepted on the strength of Holroyd's ‘Glamour,’ and,

once fairly before the public, taking the foremost rank in triumph and rapidly eclipsing their forerunner. He would be appreciated at last, delivered from the life he hated, able to lead the existence he longed for. All he wanted was a hearing ; there seemed no other way to obtain it ; he had no time to lose. How could it injure Holroyd ? He had not cared for fame in life ; would he miss it after his death ? The publishers might be mistaken ; the book might be unnoticed altogether ; *he* might prove to be the injured person.

But, as Mr. Fladgate seemed convinced of its merit, as he would evidently take anything alleged to come from the same source without a very severe scrutiny, there was nothing for it but to risk this contingency.

Mark was convinced that publishers were influenced entirely by unreasoning prejudices ; he thoroughly believed that his works would carry all before them if any firm could once overcome their repugnance to his powerful originality, and here was one firm at least prepared to lay that aside at a word from him. Why should he let it go unsaid ?

The money transactions caused him the most hesitation. If he took money for another man's work, there was a name, and a very ugly name, for that. But he would *not* keep it. As soon as he learnt the names of Holroyd's legal representatives, whoever they might be, he would pay the money over to them without mentioning the exact manner in which it had become due. In time, when he had achieved a reputation for himself, he could give back the name he had borrowed for a time—at least he told himself he could do so.

He stood in no danger of detection, or, if he did, it was very slight. Vincent was not the man to confide in more than one person ; he had owned as much. He had been reticent enough to conceal his real surname from his publishers, and now he could never reveal the truth.

All this rushed through his mind in a hurried confused form ; all his little vanities and harmless affectations and encouragements of false impressions had made him the less capable of resisting now.

'Well?' said Mr. Fladgate at last.

Mark's heart beat fast. He turned round and faced the publisher. 'I suppose I had better trust you,' he said awkwardly

and with a sort of shamefaced constraint that was admirably in keeping with his confession, though not artificial.

'And you wrote this book, "Glamour," then?'

'If you must have it—yes,' said Mark desperately.

The words were spoken now, and for good or ill he must abide by them henceforth to the end.

(To be continued.)



THE TRYST.

FAREWELL, beloved ! we will not weep ; 'tis but a little while :
 When the snow is gone I shall return with spring's returning smile.
 Where sunlight falls with shade and rain from hurrying clouds that sweep
 With nought betwixt me and the sky, there lay me down to sleep.
 The place is known to you and me, nor needs it more should know,
 So raise no stone at head or feet, but let the wild flowers blow.

And then some little part of me will creep up through the mould,
 The brightness of my hair will gleam from kingcups' hearts of gold,
 The blue that's faded from my eyes will meet your eyes again
 When little speedwells on my grave smile softly after rain.
 When the warm blood is frozen at my heart and on my lips,
 Kneel down above the dust and kiss the daisy's coral tips.

And when from out the sunset a little breeze comes by,
 And a flush of deeper colour steals across the upper sky ;
 When the beech-leaves touch and tremble, whisper soft, and then are still,
 And a bird hid in the thicket sings out sudden, sweet, and shrill ;
 When faint voices of the evening murmur peace across the land,
 And silver mists creep up and fold the woods on either hand,

Or in the early morning when the world is yet asleep,
 And the dew lies white in all the shade where the grass is green and deep,
 You'll find me there, love, waiting you ; and you may smile and say,
 'I met my darling all alone at our old tryst to-day ;'
 I look'd into her eyes so blue, I stroked her hair of gold,
 We kiss'd each other on the lips as in the days of old.'

It was her voice so low, so clear, that in mine ears did sound,
 ' Beloved, there's no such thing as death ; 'tis life that I have found ;
 The life that thrills in leaf and flower and fills the woods with song,
 That throbs in all the gleaming stars when winter nights are long—
 The life that passes with the winds from utmost shore to shore,
 Embracing all the mighty world, is mine for evermore.'

IN SUSPENSE.

Gente di molto valore
Conobbi, che in quel limbo eran sospesi.



I DIED in the latter part of the past year, 1882.

What I am about to relate has so little to do with myself that I don't think it needful to enter into details concerning that event. It is astonishing how much less largely it bulks in importance when one regards it in the past instead of the future tense. This, I have remarked, is a usual result of human experience. We continue to be greatly interested in those who have gone through the same vicissitudes, but familiarity lessens our respect for every event that has happened to ourselves. To a man who has committed a murder, for instance, the fact that he has done it takes away a great deal of its strangeness, so that he is disposed to wonder why other people should make such a fuss about a thing which, after all, is not so unusual. Death comes under the same law; there is nothing in it to be so excited about, we think, when it is over; after all it is only one in a multiplicity of events.

I came to the place I am about to describe, after having gone through various preliminaries unnecessary to dwell upon. It was, I believe, the fact that I belonged to the literary profession that determined my going in that special direction. I had never even imagined myself to be a great writer, but I was what people called painstaking and industrious, producing a good deal of conscientious work. As my works were chiefly in the daily press it does not surprise me that people here know little about them; indeed, even in the other world my reputation was chiefly at home, I might even say a local reputation, and when I travelled out of my natural surroundings I had always found that very little was known about me. The announcement of my name and the various other particulars on which I was questioned produced no sensation at all upon the personage who received me in the district of the eternal world to which I found myself allotted. I do not know why at the moment of appearing before him a recollection should have passed through my mind, by one of those freaks of fancy which defy investigation, of Dante's description of Minos in the 'Inferno,' and the somewhat ridiculous (it must be allowed)

manner in which that potentate indicated their future place to the souls whom he judged.¹ For the personage before whom I stood in no way resembled Minos. He smiled (though I said nothing) at the suggestion; for it must be allowed as detracting in some degree from the comfort of these regions that the greater number of the people you meet understand you without the necessity of any vocal medium of communication. Till one has got over one's earthly habits this is sometimes awkward enough. The official before whom I stood smiled. 'No,' he said, 'you perceive I have no tail to use in such a way; and as this is not penal, only reformatory——' He smiled, and so did I. 'You will find abundant means of choosing the occupation that suits you,' he said. 'But I think you will find it pleasant to step into the Hall first and look about. You will see a good many persons of note, and they will all be glad to see you; for a person lately arrived, and bringing news, is always welcome.'

'Do you mean then that news is esteemed here?'

'Oh, as much as in any club smoking-room in the other world. The newspapers give only the exoteric view; for the other part we are obliged, I need scarcely say, to trust to the new-comers; they will all be eager to question you. You were connected with the press? Then you must know many things,' he added with a smile, 'that have never met the public eye.'

I was a little disturbed by this. 'I know very little,' I said, 'except in the nature of hearsay, attributing motives, and that sort of thing; the news themselves are all in print. The esoteric mostly consists in giving a bad interpretation to what is done, or suggesting an evil intention.'

'We all know that: and, knowing it, our curiosity is strong to ascertain the private tide of opinion. You will find much commotion among certain distinguished members of our community in respect to recent works of which they have been the subjects.'

'Ah, that, indeed!' I cried. How thoroughly I could understand this may be divined from the fact, that I had myself left materials for a biography which would throw much light upon the profession of literature and especially journalism, and about which I felt rather anxious that my representatives should make a proper use of them. I went in accordingly to the great Hall, very willing to communicate such information as I possessed.

¹ Cignesi colla coda tante volte
Quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa.

There were few people in it. It was a very handsome spacious hall, with great tables covered with every kind of periodical and book. The walls were ornamented with frescoes, some of them very fine and spirited, though not of historical subjects, or any, indeed, that seemed to me very suitable for a great reading-room, such as this seemed to be. They were chiefly rural scenes, as hay-making, harvest-making, and such like, with some others from active life of a less rustic character; and I observed that the people about bore mostly the appearance of persons engaged in practical occupations, and whose time of repose was limited in duration. We addressed each other with the usual friendly salutations, and some inquiries were made as to the time of my arrival, the circumstances of my journey, and other such particulars, all of which I had pleasure in answering, as they seemed to have pleasure in hearing, there being, so far as my experience goes, an unusual amount of good feeling and kindness, and a ready interest in the experiences of the persons addressed which is often wanting in the earlier world. Many questions were put to me also, as I had been warned would be the case, about the state of affairs in that world, and demands made as to what were the real opinions of—my interlocutors paid me the compliment of saying—myself first: and then of persons likely to know, and who were able to judge on various matters of public importance. When I referred to the printed disquisitions on those subjects with which I perceived they were largely supplied, these were politely waved aside.

‘Politics,’ said one of my new friends, ‘have very little interest for us. What we wish to know is the opinion of people who are able to form one.’

‘Majorities do not affect us,’ another said, ‘or who is in office or who out,’ at which there was a little laughter—as I judged, because he was a man to whom this had mattered much—‘for all good men are more or less of the same opinion,’ he added. This surprised me a little, as I was accustomed to believe that men equally good might hold very different opinions on the most important questions. But my surprise, as it arose in my mind, was divined, and I had soon a reply. The speaker had by times that look of perfect self-absorption and incapacity to receive external impressions which is the mask of statesmen. ‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘one must be here out of their range in order to be fully aware what is the vital point of all questions, and what is merely

secondary and accidental. There are men who even in the first world make the discovery, and that in different ways; some by reason of a natural fineness of faculty: but this it is difficult to keep in absolute proportion, and clear from prejudice and reasoning; and age has the effect, in some minds, of detaching them from the vulgar instincts which warp the sight; but in most cases they are compelled to disguise this enlightenment. It is one of the first advantages here that we are no longer obliged to disguise it, and, free from the warp of prejudice, dare fix our attention upon what is the heart of the matter. Consequently opinions biassed by political leanings or by interest, or by any sophistication of thought, are without value in our eyes. At the same time,' he added, 'many, in whom this warp of politics or interest exists, have yet in their hearts a just and entirely satisfactory estimate of the position, if their prepossessions would permit them to bring it out.'

This led to a great deal of conversation, which was evidently very agreeable to my new friends, and in which they conveyed to my mind a great deal of instruction and more new views than it was in my power to assimilate on the moment. This was put a stop to, however, by some one having the air of an official of the place, who came in with a look of great amusement on his face, and made some slight remark or other, which scarcely caught my attention, but which caused some of my friends to jump up very hurriedly, with looks of embarrassment and even alarm, and to take up tools and implements of various kinds which had been put down on the floor or the seats, and hasten away. The tools perplexed me greatly, for the persons to whom I had been speaking were all evidently people of the highest education and most philosophical views. The individual whom I have described as looking like an official laughed as he saw my wondering looks.

'They are always at it,' he said, 'instructing the world as in the preliminary stage. Habit, you know, it is said, is second nature; but they have the grace to be ashamed of themselves when they find it out. It was not necessary for me, you observed, to say a word.'

'It is a pity,' I said, 'that people of cultivated understanding should be set to the tasks of common workmen. Don't you think it is a great waste of material? They must be fit for something better than that.'

Upon this the official personage laughed more than before. He found my remark so comical, indeed, that he became like

Milton's image 'holding both his sides.' 'You are the best of all,' he said, 'ho, ho! You know all about waste of material. It is a pity that the Master of all did not first take your advice.'

Upon this I felt, though I could scarcely tell why, such a stinging sense of shame as I am not aware of ever having felt before. My folly and audacity came before me, not so much as guilty, but as ridiculous, which was worse; and the laugh of the spectator, who seemed to see through and through me, penetrated me with a sort of arrow of remorseless amusement. There was not, however, anything ill-natured in his laugh, though perhaps such enjoyment of another's weakness was not altogether amiable. At least, this was the aspect in which, being the sufferer, it appeared to me.

This was put an end to by the entrance of several other people, all fresh from work of various kinds, and all full of interest in the new arrival, and eager to learn what I had to say. It is true that many of them, like those I had first met, were so anxious to impress upon me their own view of human affairs and tendencies, that little time was left to me to say anything; but others were more open to information, which on my side I found myself very willing to give, rather liking, if I must tell the truth, the importance of my position as the sole exponent of what men were about. It is needless to put down here all the questions upon which my opinions were requested; indeed these questions were so changed by the way in which they were stated, the light in that region falling upon them in a different way from that to which I had been accustomed, that it took some time before, in most cases, I fully understood what it was about which my new friends were asking. They were all fully acquainted with what was said on these subjects publicly upon earth, but, feeling the limitation involved in intercourse with other minds carried on by reading alone, were all the more anxious to make out by personal intercourse the discrepancies thus presented to them. They took a wider and more philosophical view than that to which I had been accustomed; and though there were variations of sentiment, and all were not equally enlightened, there was a far more clearly defined sequence of events in life as they looked at it, than I had ever before been able to see.

There were also many who spoke to me of matters personal to themselves; of books and works of their own for example, which they had left uncompleted, and of which they had no clear

information. Among these latter, ideas existed so very different from anything we meet with in the old planet, that they were very bewildering, and almost incredible to me, some being as desirous of the non-success of their own previous efforts, as others were for their acceptance and triumph. One, I remember, laughed, and hoped, he said, that a certain work might have got check in its popularity. 'When I wrote that I knew nothing about the subject,' he said.

'That is a very common case,' said another. 'In that preliminary world so little is known. The people there thought you an authority. I remember doing so myself in that curious chapter of existence. It was you who pointed out to me afterwards the flaws in your own reasoning.'

'Not difficult that,' said the first. 'It was all one flaw. Education is so poor, and the systems of thought; though I hear,' he said with a laugh, 'that the same idea prevails in a higher stage, of our methods here.'

The other laughed too with a sort of incredulous air, and I asked, for my information, whether the systems of philosophy taught here were different from those known on earth, or if it was an adaptation of ancient methods, probably influenced by a larger knowledge, which they employed. My companions were still more amused by this question, and assured me that they taught nothing here, 'except ourselves, perhaps,' they said, and pointed out to me the hod which one of them shouldered, while the other had a mason's mallet in his hand. They were at work building a house, and very healthy and ruddy they looked, with a fine air of activity and energetic life. I confess that I could not but feel the regret which I had before expressed to see men of cultivated minds engaged in occupations so strangely unlike the high training and culture they had received: but was checked in this thought by a recollection of their own amused estimate of that culture, and evident superiority to it in their own conception, strangely inferior as their present occupations seemed to me to be. They laughed still more as they perceived this thought in my mind (another evidence of the inconvenience to a person, unaccustomed to it, of this kind of transparency), and told me I should never be able to conceive, till I tried, the pleasure of getting a wall straight and making a perfect angle. When I replied that I could not help thinking powers much less cultivated than theirs would have suited such a purpose, they answered in the most cheerful and

light-hearted manner that education was a long process, and that they were far from being done with it yet. ‘Housebuilding is an excellent corrective to philosophy,’ one of them said; and ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are thought of’—said the other. I did my best, seeing that my ideas were so uncomfortably open to them, to make no comment in my mind upon this at all.

Here, however, we were interrupted by the entrance of a shaggy figure, with which I had been very familiar in the preliminary life. He was a large frame of a man, but had never been filled out or extended by such bodily exercise as his race required; and though his cheek had never lost the rustic red nor his mind the uncompromising expressions of a peasant, he had stooped and shambled somewhat, so far as concerned the outer man, in his mortal days. He seemed to me to have added a cubit (if I knew how much that was) to his stature, and the development of his physical organs had cleared up the cloudy face full of laughter yet of storms, with its frequent flush of wrath and those bursts of vituperation which always ended in the deep rumble of a volcanic laugh. It had not become a peaceful face even now, but was subject to such atmospheric variations as come and go on the hills, swept by sudden lights and shadows. He carried a spade over his shoulders and brought in with him a whiff of that upturned earth which the great Bacon held to be so wholesome, and a waft of fresh air as from the broad and breezy fields. He cast a glance at me, but said nothing for the moment, his eyes giving out a gleam of amused criticism upon my companions, who, I easily understood, were of an order very unlike himself—and retired to a chair, into which he flung himself with a long breath of satisfaction, like a man who had earned a moment of repose and was pleased to have it. I saw that he gave us a glance from time to time as he turned over the piles of books and periodicals on the table, but he did not make any approach till my philosophers had gone to the building of their house; then he came towards me, holding out a large and cordial hand.

‘So ye have found your way here?’ he said. ‘Ye are very welcome! there’s many that will be pleased to see you, for the way is a trifle confused, and every one does not just hit it. Well! and would you say they were wearied of me and my concerns yet in your bit little earth, where we seem to have made grand sport for the Philistines,’ he added with one of those outbursts of laughter

which were so characteristic of him. His eye had all its old keenness, and I was a little alarmed to have to say my say upon this subject to the hero himself upon whom so many strictures had been made. ‘Ah!’ he said with another laugh, ‘I see your difficulty. Ye have had a good deal to do with the sport in your own person. Well, well, we can understand that; it was all in the way of your trade.’

‘We had all something to do with it,’ said I; ‘and you must know that it was, in a great measure, your own fault.’

‘That I know very well,’ he said; ‘and I am not taking it, as ye perceive, in any tragical kind of a way. That bit of a world sets all things wrong in a man’s head. There is so little of it, and ye think everything of it—till the moment comes when ye are set free, and the temptation is to think nothing. Ay, ay, it was my own fault. There is a great bitterness,’ he said, stretching himself out, and with a stress upon the vowels such as I well remembered in him, ‘and confusion and bewildering darkness in the thought, that just when a man is fully equipped and has his ideas matured, it is all to be turned into nothing, and the good of him and the harm of him lost for ever.’

‘I should have thought,’ said I, ‘that to lose the harm of him would be always an advantage.’

‘Ay, ye would think that, would ye? But I have a great opinion of the mental faculties. There is none of them that can be spared.’ Here he began to laugh again. ‘Not even,’ he said, ‘what you may call the literary-traitor faculty, which is just one of your grand æsthetic arts, if ye look at it impartially, and chiefly the outcome of the nineteenth century, with all its improvements; for to make out a true man to be a picturesque fiction and all his beliefs a kind of fungus-growth upon the skin of him, instead of a principle of life within, what is that but a high development of the grand Fiction and Lie of Life which is the present ideal? Ye will say I have had my share in establishing the hunt after it and making men’s minds familiar with the thought that what is turned to the world is oftenest but Clothes. Ay, I agree to that. Ye see,’ he added with a gleam of humour, ‘I had not thought of it as applied to my own case.’

‘I am afraid,’ I said, ‘it has been very disagreeable to you; it has given you annoyance?’

Upon this he laughed again. ‘That is a kind of thing,’ he said, ‘which has but a brief existence in this place; not that we

are any way elevated above the opinion of our fellows, but, as you will have found out, the existence of the sham, even in its unconscious—which is always its most dangerous—state, is little possible when ye have the clearness of vision that distinguishes our neighbours here; by which means delusion cannot long entertain, and even the funkey has little means of turning his master into another nightmare and illusion for the further disenchantment of the world.'

' You are thinking of——' I said.

Upon this he fell a-laughing again, and answered, ' I have no animosity to man: nor does it appear to me in any other light than that of a keen piece of historical satire, what ye call the irony of fate, or, sometimes, poetic justice. But I would not answer for it if the Wife were to lay her hands upon him, who was never what ye call a very tolerant woman. Ye have all a hand in it,' he added after a moment: ' I am thinking I have had a certain affinity to Samson's riddle with which he dispersed into outer darkness all yon cohort of the light-minded—"Out of the eater came forth meat." I have devoured in my day; it is meet I should furnish occasion for some fine feeding in my turn.'

' You see,' said I with diffidence, ' there were many people who loved you well, but could not understand why you should have treated them and those belonging to them with such contempt. I am not criticising; I am but——'

He shot a glance at me from under his shaggy eyebrows which made me feel my smallness better than a thousand words, and at the same time made me fear that I, too, was to be dispersed like Samson's tormentors: for I had not yet acquired the faculty of seeing the thoughts as they arose. I was somewhat astonished therefore when he said nothing except, with a shake of his head, "The sorrows of death encompassed me; the pains of hell gat hold upon me." And it was not till a full minute had passed that he added, ' When a man is at what he thinks the end of life, awaiting the moment when he shall be bidden to begone into the eternal darkness—and learns that he that thought himself a true man has been in his way as base, and blind, and ignorant as any: and of the nature of the tyrants and eaters of men's souls: and can make no amends, nor ever have his day's work over again!—Yon Apostle with the bitter tongue, that has left but one utterance, and no more, I wonder what they thought of him in the church meetings and among the pious women—whom he was, no

doubt, civil to before the torrent broke. "Clouds without water," he says, "carried about of the winds; trees whose fruit withereth, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame." Yet he had a tender heart, and would have no man bring a railing accusation'

While I was trying with some perplexity to piece my thoughts together and make out what this meant, some one came bustling in who had a long shepherd's staff in his hand, and that sort of primitive wrap over his shoulder which in Scotland is called a plaid, and in which the guardian of the flock can carry a lamb when need is. He came in with a smiling air of one who is used to setting everything right, and laid his hand upon my companion's arm. 'What is going wrong?' he said. 'When you quote Scripture at this rate, and fume and march about (for the first speaker had been pacing the hall back and forward), there is evidently need of Me. Dearest fellow, what is going wrong?'

At this my friend gave him a keen, humorous look from under his eyebrows, and, with a laugh which broke out of the solemnity of his aspect very strangely, retired to his seat again, and left the new comer in possession of the field. He was a smooth, ready, vivacious personage, very well known, indeed, in the places whence I had come; the change of costume was more striking in him than it had been in the others. He gave me a smile and a white hand. 'The prophet is always vehement,' he said, with a little glance aside as if he and I had a mutual understanding on this subject and comprehended our friend better than he did himself. 'You are speaking, of course, of the biography? Very curious, very curious, my dear sir, the manner in which we are dealt with after we go. It is a kind of refined infidelity, nothing better; quite natural, you know, in our friend's legatee, but not at all natural in that dearest boy of mine, whose training was so different. It betrays a certain conviction that they are never to see us again, which is a mistake in every way. This will make it awkward for them when they come after us, more awkward than it had any need to be: awkward in their own feelings,' said the shepherd, rubbing his hands; 'though in our bosoms no offence dwells.'

'Yes, your lordship,' said the other, from his chair. 'Ye are just as badly treated as the rest of us, and have made sport for the Philistines, too.'

The shepherd hung his head a little, and then looked up with a benignant smile. ‘Dearest R——,’ he said, ‘must have found they were making me dull. It was so; the beginning was respectable, most respectable: but the reader missed the bishop of his heart. I was getting a little tedious, a thing men did not expect from me. I do not blame my dear one; he knew if there was one thing more foreign to me than another that was the thing. He made a dash to my rescue. Unfortunately the dear fellow’s zeal was superior to his judgment. It often is so in these warm-hearted natures; my jottings explain themselves, I hope—notes, mere notes; and when there are many people talking and one’s self perhaps talking, it is possible the most of all——’

‘One fails to catch,’ I said diffidently, ‘which voice it is that has spoken?’

He smiled approvingly, yet at the same time with an apologetic look. ‘Yes,’ said the shepherd, ‘it is possible you are right. A great deal is always being said in society: you get the substance sometimes but not the manner of putting it—or, perhaps, the other way, the manner of putting it without the substance—which is, perhaps, the most seductive; and names are a snare. The eighteenth century was wiser with its asterisks. Nothing, I need not say, could be further from my intention than to wound people’s feelings, or betray their indiscretions. Dearest R—— has been incautious, very incautious. Impossible to lament it more than I do,’ he said, folding his hands meekly and with a sigh: but there was in the corner of the shepherd’s eye a twinkle—and the other burst into a laugh.

‘He is, perhaps, not altogether so sorry as might appear upon the face of him. He finds in it an eternal warning to the blabbers, the men that are loose of lip and long of tongue. And if there had but been the voice of a prophet to do it, to clear the earth of the infernal vermin!——’

‘Hush, hush, hush, hush!’ cried the shepherd, with his hand upon the arm of him that bore the spade. ‘These words, you know, in the presence of —! You must remember the charge, “Swear not at all.” But you were always given to strong language.’ Then he went on, with a little laugh running through his words: ‘Perhaps it may be a good moral lesson, as our friend says: but unintentional, entirely unintentional. I could find it in my heart to be angry with my dear one; but he meant it for the best. And such an accident is full of morals. Not to make jottings at all:

or to burn them ; or, perhaps, to make them more full, so that no respectable clergyman may have it in his power to make you dull, and so tempt your affectionate relatives to interfere. Finally, to use asterisks as they did in the eighteenth century, in which golden age, dearest man, there were no misfortunes like ours. Yet dear Horace Walpole spoke plainly enough ; perhaps the ultimate cause is hurry—Hurry ! our friends will not wait !'

'They think,' said the other, 'that this generation—perhaps the meanest of all generations that have ever trod the earth—will have no recollection of the very names of us after a year or two, but will just drive on to destruction over every great roaring torrent of a Niagara that lies in their way with none now to give a warning, nor point out the whirl of destruction into which —.'

'O-o-h !' said the shepherd, drawing in his breath. 'Dearest fellow ! come ; here we don't take such a dismal view of affairs. I see great confusion myself, and a sad want of men to fill my place. Still, it is not so bad as that ; twenty years hence, fifty even, we shall still be remembered. You were always too despondent ; but it is a lesson of humility, not unneeded even here, to see one's self set up before the world as a writer of slip-slop.' The shepherd shivered a little and spread out his white hands. 'Slip-slop !' he said ; 'there is no other word. Dearest R— ! how incautious, how indifferent to his father's fame ! To be revealed even in one's bedchamber as capable of *that*.'

'You may be sure,' I said, 'that it was an error of love—and that admiration and enthusiasm with which you filled all about you. They thought everything that your hand had touched must be excellent, the best of its kind.'

The shepherd turned upon me a beaming look of gratitude and approval. 'Dear fellow !' he said ; but there was always a twinkle in his eye ; 'my friends were indeed too partial —'

The other interrupted this with his usual laugh. 'There is a depth of the flunkey mind,' he said, 'perhaps the most terrible abyss of all, in which the straw and rubbish become emblems of perfection, and the sweepings of a bedchamber turn to pearls and diamonds as in a fairy tale. Light-flying frivolities, exhalations of no-thought and an idle brain, or even a ball of common dirt flecked from the finger after some inimical passer-by, or vagrant vermin of a mongrel dog, will thus be laid up in jewelled cabinets and preserved for the edification of posterity, much

perplexed by its treasures in that kind ! Whether that is the worst : or if a blacker still is the Jesuit-Iconoclast, the son of darkness, and father of slaves ; the Ham-Benjamin that uncovers the old man's nakedness, notwithstanding that he had the double portion laid into the sack of him, and was the last—— One might say they were the two sides of that lying worship of heroes that puts to shame the true. Cynic-investigator valet, with his master “ no hero ” on one hand : and what may be called the Dustman-enthusiast, gatherer up of beard clippings, old rags, and relics—phantasmal heaps—”

Our benign companion had been listening sweetly with a slight shake of his head and a faint *tchich-tchich* now and then of indulgent toleration, but here he burst in with—‘ No, no ; come now, come ; not so bad as that. Dearest R— ! He may have wanted judgment. To the best of sons, who never gave an hour’s anxiety to his father, this quality may yet be incommunicable. He has saved me, as I have already pointed out, from the swathings of respectability in which my earlier biographers had clothed me. Can I say he has done ill, dearest boy ? I suffer in the letter, but perhaps in the spirit—’

Then it surprised me very much to see approaching a maid, one of the servants of the place, who had been sweeping with a large broom at some distance from us, and who had made haste to remove, on their entrance, the traces of the soil which the boots of my friend and his pastoral companion had left upon the pure marble of the floor. Having ended that portion of her work she had taken a very long *plumet*, or feather brush, with which she had been clearing every trace of cobweb or other soil or accumulation from the corners and intricacies of the beautifully designed cornice. She came up to us now with this over her shoulder. She was of a stout figure, not handsome nor young, but with an energetic, lively look in her plain countenance which was not unattractive. She said good-humouredly, yet with a touch of disdain, ‘ You men have never the courage of your opinions. Before I came away I took care to leave the results of my observation of my friends very clearly upon the record. I was content with no jottings down of chance stories like yours, my lord. I put it all on paper what I thought of them. In common society it is awkward, and might produce complications ; but I think it has a fine moral effect, when you feel sure you will be out of reach, to let them know what you always thought of them. Eh ? Oh, yes,

I hear you well enough ; it is only the old habit of the trumpet that sticks to me.'

' Dear lady,' said the shepherd (notwithstanding the broom), ' women are always more ingenious than our duller sex ; but is there not something cynical in your statement of the case ?'

' Probably there is a great deal that is cynical. I never was a person moved by gusts of passion like our friend here, or fond of that little pinch in passing which was a pleasure to you. I was always a downright person. I was never done full justice to. Government used to take my help and pick my brains, but never offered me a C.B. As for their pensions, I scorned money—in that way. Even my parents never did me justice : and for my friends, when I was a notability they fawned upon me. I was determined there should be no mistake about it. I can't pretend, like you, that I never intended it. There was, however, one mistake I made,' she said, reaching up at the height of her *plumet* to destroy a cobweb—(' how quick these spiders spin !—faster than any of us ; and need no publisher). There was one mistake, and I am delighted to have done it in such good company.'

' What was that, Harriet ? I always thought you a very honest woman ; saying your say perhaps not always with the highest wisdom, but in a serious, straightforward way, grappling with the naked truth of things.'

' That has rather an immodest sound, and I should object to it if I had been an American. The mistake I made was the same as that which one of you has already pointed out : that I never thought I was likely to meet these people again ; and here am I caretaker of this hall, and right in the way of every one of them ! It gives me a little shock when they come in as they all do, though it is rather humbling to perceive that most of them have forgotten all about it, while I remember every word. That is confusing. Of course it is done on purpose. I am here on purpose ; and in the curious change of circumstances it does me a great deal of good. You, now,' said this plain-spoken lady, touching me on the arm, ' you don't recollect who I am. Oh, yes ; I can see into your mind, remember. You are asking yourself, Who is she ? And I was a great light in my day ; but I have been longer here than these two, and even the fuss that was made by all my friends about whom I spoke my mind, has died away. So will the fuss about you too die away.'

' And then we shall be judged on our merits,' said the gentle

shepherd. ‘In a good hour ! but probably we shall all have passed on before this to a higher sphere, and will not even hear of it. What matter ? We cannot, my dearest friends, go on thinking for centuries of what happened in the course of sixty or even eighty years. You were both octogenarians, I think ? What vitality ! Now I must go back to my few sheep—they may stray if I linger longer in this delightful intercourse. You don’t know yet, dear fellow, what you are going to do ?’

‘Not yet,’ I said ; ‘but surely, I must say it, this is a dreadful waste of material—to put men like you into occupations that —— ’

My friend took up his crook and with a benignant smile waved his hand to me. ‘One dear flock is like another,’ he said ; ‘and then the blessed peacefulness of it—no rivals, no promotion. An obstinacy of going astray, perhaps, to which my experience, however, finds many parallels ; but no complications. Dear innocents ! I draw in health and vigour every day.’

‘But you,’ I said, looking at the prophet ; ‘you who —— ’

He drew himself up with one of his cavernous laughs, bursting, with a rumble of echoes, from his deep chest ; strong, vigorous, unimpeded, a model of his kind. ‘I have gotten back,’ he said, ‘to the original of my race. I till the soil that is truth incarnate in its solid, silent way, and deceives no man. The shadows and the phantasms are departed, gone back into chaos whence they came. There is now no contradiction between thoughts and things. The red earth is kindly, there is health in the smell of it. And I am thinking there’s still better to come.’

So saying he waved his hand to me and went out with a step that rang like a trumpet. I was left alone with her of the broom ; her whole mind seemed to be set upon the dislodgment of a nest of spiders which seemed to have twisted their filaments round and round the open work of the cornice. She was on tiptoe reaching up to them, and I thought civility required that I should offer to do it for her. Whereupon she turned upon me with a half-indignant air.

‘Have you not heard yet what your own work is to be ? You will find that enough for you without helping me ; not but what it was kind enough,’ she added. ‘Oh ! I know what was your profession. But I am one that would give the Devil his due.’

‘You are talking of —— a fabulous personage,’ I said.

She stopped and looked down upon me, though I was tall and she was dumpy; such was the constitution of the woman that she looked down. ‘Oh! you think so,’ she said; and then, with the utmost contempt of which the gesture was capable, stood up on her toes again, and stretched upwards at the full length of her arm towards the cobwebs on the roof.

It was at this moment that the official, of whom I have previously spoken, approached me with what seemed a sort of warrant in his hand. I may mention that I was by profession a critic; I had brought many men to the ground that were better than I; I had helped some reputations, but marred many. I was rather renowned for slashing articles. The man in office approached me with a malicious smile in his eyes.

‘You will take this to the kitchen department,’ he said.

I was allotted to —. But why need I disclose it? Would it make my brethren spare a dart, or mitigate a spiteful sentence? No! so I refrain from any attempt at a moral. Also I must allow, as happens invariably in that place which is the first step in moral reformation, that, when I had become accustomed to it, I did not dislike my new occupation at all.

THE ROMANCE OF PAULILATINO.

I.



OUNT VINCENZO DI SAN BENEDETTO DI GIAVE was a young man well known to Florentine society and much liked in certain sections of it, where—time, in these days, being of importance even in Italy—he was commonly spoken of and addressed as Vincenzo Giave, without further syllabic embellishment. The son of a Sardinian landed proprietor of ancient lineage, he was currently reported to be possessed of large means; and although, as regarded the immediate present, this general impres-

sion was an erroneous one, there could be no doubt that the Sardinian acres must come to him eventually;—a circumstance which did not tend to lessen his popularity.

A singular circumstance in connection with this young man was that, in spite of his being an only child, he had not set eyes on his father for twenty years out of the five-and-twenty which had elapsed since his birth; and what was perhaps even more singular was that this estrangement had arisen out of no quarrel between the father and son, but simply from the fact that neither of them had ever expressed, or felt the smallest desire, to become acquainted with the other. As far as Vincenzo was concerned, such a lack of natural affection was hardly blameworthy and certainly not surprising; for his home from his earliest boyhood had been with an uncle and aunt, who had nursed him through his childish ailments, educated him, supplied him with such pocket-money as he required, and treated him in all respects like one of their own numerous family. Naturally, therefore, he considered himself as belonging rather to them than to the shadowy old person in Sar-

dinia, who wrote to him on an average once in a twelvemonth, and whose letters on those rare occasions were of the most formal and meagre description.

As for the old Count, the indifference which he manifested towards his son might easily have been accounted for by those who knew him, upon the ground of his absolute indifference to everything that this world contains, save money alone. With that single exception, the Count di San Benedetto di Giave liked nothing and nobody ; but, on the other hand, there were many persons and things for whom and for which he felt a hearty dislike, and prominent among these were children. It is difficult to conjecture what, after his wife's death, would have been the fate of his own five-year old offspring if the Countess's sister and her husband, the Cavaliere Legnani, had not written from Florence to beg that little Vincenzo might be entrusted to their care. No doubt they were acquainted with their brother-in-law's peculiarities and were aware that their offer would be accepted, if not with gratitude, at all events with alacrity. 'Take him, my good friends,' wrote the old Count, without waste of time ; 'take him with my blessing. He is a fine and amiable child ; he will be a credit to you and a loss to me. But take him. I can give you no more convincing proof of my profound respect and esteem.'

It is far from improbable that the worthy Legnani couple received no aid from the old Count in the task they had undertaken beyond that which the above-mentioned benediction might be supposed to supply ; for he was not the man to offer money, nor were they people who would be at all likely to ask for it. Without being rich, they had yet enough to enable them to live at their ease, to educate their children thoroughly, and to mix in the artistic and literary society towards which their tastes inclined them. It was in these literary and artistic circles that Count Vincenzo, when he became a man, was chiefly appreciated. He grew up a handsome young fellow with a pale oval face, small features, a pair of magnificent velvety-brown eyes, and a somewhat melancholy expression of countenance ; which last did not, however, indicate any inward dissatisfaction with his lot. By education, and probably also by temperament, he was a worshipper of all beautiful things, not to speak of beautiful people ; he was a first-rate judge of a picture ; he knew a great deal about old china, old enamels, old lace, and similar matter ; and besides all this he was very fond of dancing,

in which art he excelled. With these qualifications it was natural that he should shine most in the company of ladies; but his amiability and courteous manners had won him many friends of his own sex as well. It had never entered into the heads of those who were responsible for this refined and pleasing, but entirely useless creature, to put him into any profession. ‘What is the good of being a rich man’s son,’ the good-natured Cavaliere Legnani was wont to ask, ‘if you are to turn the talents which you have received from Heaven into a mere means of supporting existence? Most artists are obliged to do so, and that cannot be helped; though it is a pity that they should be so cramped. Vincenzo is free to devote his life to art in the highest sense of the word; he will never need to earn his bread, or to trouble himself about pleasing the public. My brother-in-law is an old man, and my nephew will assuredly be a very wealthy one before many years are past.’

Vincenzo, however, was not an artist; and the Cavaliere, in reasoning thus, had omitted to take into account the chapter of accidents. An accident happened to him one day to which all of us are liable, yet few expect, namely, he fell sick of a dangerous disease and succumbed to it.

The death of the head of a family, which in England often means the break-up of a home, almost invariably means that upon the Continent. When Signor Legnani’s fortune had been divided between his widow and his children, of whom three were already married men, one of the pleasantest houses in Florence was closed for ever, and a collection of bric-à-brac was thrown upon the market of which Vincenzo Giave would have been the first to profit if he had not been too sad at heart to think at that time of gratifying his usual innocent greed for pretty things. There was another circumstance—a very queer little circumstance, as it seemed to the young man—which would in any case have precluded him from being a buyer: he had no money. Hitherto money had come, when wanted, from his uncle; but now his uncle was dead, and he was wondering in total bewilderment what he ought to do next, and whither he was to go, when both questions were answered for him after a fashion which gave his nerves a great shock: that is to say, by a letter from his father requesting and requiring his immediate return home. ‘I cannot,’ wrote the old gentleman, ‘undertake to defray the ruinous expense of your residence alone in Florence; there is therefore nothing for it

but to prepare rooms for you in this house, and I have accordingly prepared them. On Friday next, I believe, a steamer leaves Leghorn for Cagliari ; you had better cross by it. Your aunt Legnani will doubtless supply you with the requisite passage-money, which I will repay her as soon as an opportunity presents itself.'

This affectionate missive went near to breaking the heart of its recipient. Poor Vincenzo was essentially a man of cities. He had no great love for the country at any time, and upon Sardinia he looked with much the same feelings as a born and bred Londoner might perhaps entertain towards the Shetland Islands or the wilds of Galway. However, to use his father's encouraging phrase, 'there was nothing for it' but to go. He did not request a loan from Signora Legnani, for he was beginning to understand much that had hitherto been kindly concealed from him ; but he sold a few of his treasures to a dealer, and, having said farewell to his friends and his happy days, set out with a heavy heart to confront destiny.

Destiny, as discernible from the deck of a steamer in the bay of Cagliari on a wild February morning, and after a stormy passage from the mainland, wore a sufficiently forbidding visage. Across the vast plain inland, low grey clouds were flying from the west ; the mountains to the eastward were veiled in mist ; splashes of rain fell every now and then ; the dreary, poverty-stricken town of Cagliari—which yet is lively and wealthy for Sardinia—seemed to Vincenzo to greet him with a blank stare, as though to ask what in the world a man of his tastes could want in such a place. He hurried on shore, closing his eyes and ears against impressions which could only be dispiriting ones, and scarcely bestowing a glance of languid curiosity upon the picturesque bearded figures who carried his luggage up to the railway-station, and who, with their jackets adorned with a mass of silver buttons, their Phrygian caps, their short-kilted petticoats, loose linen trousers, and black gaiters, looked like a cross between Genoese fishermen and Greek brigands. Soon he was ensconced in the corner of a railway-carriage, and was progressing at a snail's pace along the newly-constructed line which is to regenerate Sardinia—some day.

As often as Vincenzo looked out of the window he shuddered ; and indeed there was some excuse for him. The great, melancholy plain of Cagliari, sun-baked in summer, storm-swept in winter, fever-stricken always, stretched away on his right hand and his left to meet the low horizon ; vegetation was scanty ; the sparse

dwellings in sight were mere hovels ; the little knots of peasants congregated round the wayside stations were certainly not prepossessing of aspect. The men were, for the most part, clad in goatskins, the women in rags ; men and women alike had their heads and necks muffled up in handkerchiefs or hoods as a protection against the poisonous exhalations which for ever hang over that part of the island. ‘Heavens ! what a country !—what a people !’ sighed the disconsolate representative of advanced civilisation in his railway-carriage.

The train jogged on, mounting imperceptibly as it pursued its slow course towards the high table-land of the interior, while the grey daylight faded away. It was quite dark when the small station of Paulilatino, where our traveller was to alight, was reached. As he stepped out, he became aware of a stalwart individual with a grizzled beard, whose garb appeared to be that of a farmer of the better class, and who took off his hat, saying :

‘ You do not remember me, Signor Vincenzo ; how should you ? I am Sandro, the *fattore*, at your service.’

‘ I remember you perfectly, Sandro,’ answered the young man, holding out his hand ; ‘ you used to carry me about on your shoulder when I was a child, and my mother was always in a terrible fright lest you should let me fall. So you are still in the old place ? And you are quite well, I hope, Sandro ? ’ It raised his spirits a little to feel the rough hand of this old friend close round his own slim fingers. ‘ And—and my father,’ he added, with a momentary hesitation ; ‘ is he quite well, too ? ’

Sandro shrugged his broad shoulders ever so slightly. ‘ Il Signor Conte,’ he replied, ‘ is—as he always is. I have brought two young men down to carry your trunks to the village.’

‘ Ah !—the village. Is that far ? ’

‘ Eh ! it is where it was ; it has not moved. A little two miles from the station. But, to be sure, there was no station when you went away, Signorino.’

‘ The house is near the village, is it not ? ’

‘ Near ?—it is in the middle of the village. Have you forgotten ? ’ asked Sandro, staring.

The fact was that this circumstance had escaped Vincenzo’s memory. Some dim childish recollections he had of large, empty rooms and long corridors ; when he had thought of his father’s abode at all, he had pictured it to himself as a lonely castle. He was rather relieved to find that this was not so, and that there

would be human beings around him, even though they would be only Sardinian villagers. ‘Ah, well,’ he said, ‘it is many years since I was here, and I was not of an age to notice localities when I left. I suppose,’ he continued, looking out into the darkness, ‘there is a carriage of some kind waiting for us.’

‘A carriage!’ echoed Sandro, in astonishment; ‘what should we do with a carriage in Paulilatino? And how should we get it up there?’

‘You don’t mean to say that there is no road to the place?’ ejaculated Vincenzo.

‘*Che vuole?* They promise us a road some day; but for my part I would rather be upon the back of a good horse than upon wheels on a dark night like this.’

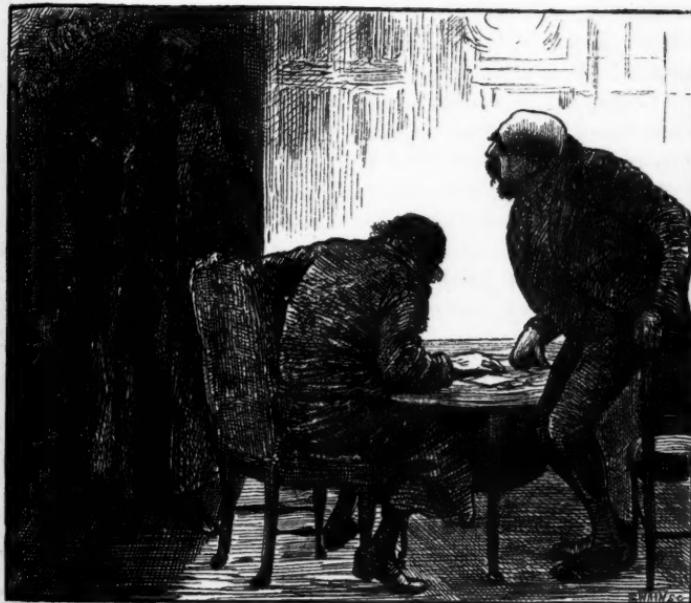
The young Count sighed, but made no rejoinder. In a few minutes he was mounted upon one of the rough little Sardinian horses, whose powers of endurance and surefootedness are so famous, and was following, rather by hearing than by sight, in the wake of the *fattore*, who had ridden on ahead. By what kind of a track they were mounting it was impossible to see; but Vincenzo, finding himself at one moment on slippery rocks and the next in an abyss of mud, concluded that it was a tolerably rough one, and wisely left all responsibility to the instinct or knowledge of his beast. The two miles—if indeed they were but two—took a long time to accomplish, and were made up of a series of alternate scramblings and flounderings; but neither Vincenzo nor his horse came down; and at length, all of a sudden, they were in a narrow street, or rather in a channel of mud with low houses on either side of it, which Sandro said was Paulilatino.

In none of these houses was there a candle burning or any symptom of human life; but the clatter of the horses’ hoofs roused three or four yelping dogs, and presently somebody appeared out of the darkness, bearing a lantern, by the light of which Vincenzo could make out the semicircle of a stunted archway. Through this Sandro rode, and dismounted; and he, doing likewise, found himself in a yard such as most Italian country inns are provided with, composed on three sides of stables and out-buildings, and on the fourth of a tumbledown edifice which was obviously ‘home.’

‘It is worse even than I expected!’ muttered poor Vincenzo, following Sandro up a dirty stone staircase.

On the first landing were double doors, one wing of which the *fattore* flung open, announcing in stentorian tones, ‘ Il Signorino Vincenzo !’ as the young man made his way into a large, scantily-furnished room.

The two men, who were playing cards before the wood fire, turned their heads as if they did not much relish the interruption ; and one of them got up slowly and moved away. He was a fat, unshaven personage whom Vincenzo afterwards learnt to be the Sindaco of the village. The old man with the pinched features,



who was clad in a dressing-gown and a velvet skull-cap, and who had not risen, was, of course, his father. Vincenzo had a moment of embarrassment and hesitation which the author of his being did nothing to relieve : then, feeling that somebody must do something, and that the proper thing had better be done, he stooped down, laid his hands lightly upon the old man’s shoulders, and kissed him on both cheeks.

He was rather glad when this embrace was over ; for, to tell the truth, the old man was a very dirty old man, and had been

having garlic with his dinner. He had evidently not shaved for several days, for he had a chin like a nutmeg-grater; and, judging by the way in which he scrubbed his cheeks with a red pocket-handkerchief, he did not like being kissed. 'I needn't do it again, then,' thought Vincenzo, with a faint inward acknowledgment that things are seldom so terribly bad but that they might conceivably be worse.

'So you have arrived,' the old Count said, after a long pause; and presently he went on to inquire after the health of Signora Legnani. 'I cannot understand your uncle's death,' he added querulously. 'A young man—quite a young man—twenty years younger than I, at least; and then to die like that, without any warning! It is most extraordinary.'

'I suppose he couldn't help it,' observed Vincenzo; but his father shook his head. Clearly he thought that the Signor Legnani ought to have helped it.

After this, silence once more fell upon the company; until the Sindaco, who had been looking the new-comer over from head to foot, as if he had never seen anything at all like him before (and probably he never had), gave utterance to a modest conviction that he was *de trop*, and offered to retire.

'No, no!' cried the old Count, with more animation than he had yet displayed; 'why should you go? Let us finish our game.' He looked appealingly at Vincenzo, and then, struck by a bright idea—'You will want something to eat,' he said. 'Sandro will see to you. Go, my son, and get something to eat.'

And with that he drew his chair closer to the table, and picked up the greasy cards which he had relinquished on his son's entrance.

The Conte di Giave was not a miser to the extent of starving either himself or his dependants. With actual coin it was grievous to him to part; but the food consumed in his establishment was seldom paid for in this way. His estates on hill and plain supplied him with all the necessaries and some of the luxuries of life; many of his tenants, too, were allowed to discharge their debts in kind; and so no belated traveller, seeking shelter for the night at Paulilatino, was in danger of being sent empty away. In a country where inns are all but unknown such hospitality is, indeed, almost obligatory; and the Sards, unlike their neighbours on the mainland, are accustomed to eat as much meat as Englishmen. The cooking, it is true, was hardly of a kind to please

fastidious palates such as Vincenzo's ; but hunger and fatigue blunt the edge of delicate perceptions, and the young Count complained neither of his fare, nor of the hard bed upon which he was soon afterwards stretched in a profound slumber.

II.



HEN Vincenzo had been a few weeks under the paternal roof he felt as though he had dwelt there for years. The old Vincenzo Giave, who had been used to attend art-sales and lounge in ladies' boudoirs and dance all the happy night through at Florence, was dead—so he said to himself—and in his place was a forlorn

youth without enjoyment in the present or hope for the future ; a youth who sometimes thought of turning the muzzle of the revolver, which had been his last purchase before leaving civilisation, towards his head, and of putting an end to all care and weariness in that way. He hated Paulilatino, its life and its surroundings, with a perfect hatred ; but he never thought of escape. It was not in his nature to look far ahead, or to regard his father's advanced age as pointing towards emancipation at no very distant date.

Of his father he saw next to nothing. The old gentleman spent the whole day in his own rooms, either dozing or poring over accounts, and only emerged, like an owl, after nightfall, when the Sindaco or the parish priest would come in and play a game of cards with him. Neighbours of his own rank he had none ; such

landed proprietors as there were within a day's ride of Paulilatino dwelling, after the fashion of the island, in seclusion, and keeping their wives and daughters in a stricter seclusion still. This Vincenzo had discovered by inquiry, for it had occurred to him that if he could get up a flirtation with somebody's wife or daughter life might be a shade less dreary. But no such person was available, and, in default of any other confidant, he poured his griefs into the ear of Sandro, who sympathised with, although he did not at all understand, them.

'But, Signorino,' he remonstrated one morning when the two were riding together across the slopes which trend upwards beyond Abbasanta (for Vincenzo, in sheer lack of any other occupation, usually accompanied the steward on his daily rounds); 'but, Signorino, there is no sense in quarrelling with a place for not being some other place. You cannot make wine out of olives, but they will yield you excellent oil; and though, I grant you, we have no great cities in Sardinia, we have that of our own which you would be puzzled to match in Tuscany. Look at our *nuraghi*, for instance! Every one agrees that they are thousands of years old; older by a great deal than the Roman ruins which you make such a fuss about over the water; and professors, with spectacles on their noses, come from the very ends of the earth (as I have been told) only to see them, and many books have been written about them; and in spite of all that,' concluded Sandro, triumphantly, '*nobody has ever found out what they are!* Now there, if you like, is something interesting!'

'Not to me,' answered Vincenzo, with a melancholy shake of the head. He had inspected one or two of the curious prehistoric towers, known as *nurhags*, which abound in Sardinia, and had soon arrived at the conclusion that he did not in the least care whether their original constructors had used them as dwellings, according to the hypothesis of some archæologists, or as tombs, or as watch-towers, which were the views adopted by others. 'When you have seen one, you have seen them all,' he said.

'Well, but then there is the sport,' continued Sandro. 'Where in the kingdom is such sport to be found as in Sardinia? You would not perhaps care to spend a night or two in the open; otherwise, over yonder in Genargentù, you might get a shot at a red deer, or perhaps at a *moufflon*; but for winged game in plenty one need not go so far. You should take your gun with you, as I do,' said the *fattore*, who indeed never failed to carry a fowling-piece across

his saddle-bow, after the custom of the country. ‘And, besides, he added, ‘it is always well to be armed. One does not know what may happen.’

‘I suppose this delightful country adds banditti to its other charms,’ sighed Vincenzo. ‘They told me in Florence that I should very likely get my throat cut here.’

‘They know very little about us in Florence,’ returned Sandro, somewhat nettled. ‘No, no; we have no banditti here; but just now the people are not very well contented. The taxes are terrible, and prices have risen, and the crops are not what they used to be. You cannot expect a hungry man to be over-scrupulous. And then, in the mountains, there are a few unfortunates who are obliged to keep out of the way, you understand.’

‘I suppose you mean murderers.’

‘I would not call them that; but perhaps they may have been so unlucky as to kill somebody. Well, if you were to meet one of them, I do not say but that he might ask for your purse or your watch.’

‘I am not altogether unprotected,’ remarked Vincenzo, unbuttoning his coat and showing the revolver which he carried in his waistband.

Sandro made a grimace. ‘A shot-gun is better,’ he said. ‘I not do like these toys. They are no use at a distance, and at close quarters—well, you would most likely kill the poor fellow, and that is not what one wants.’

‘I should do nothing of the sort,’ Vincenzo answered; ‘I have a prejudice against shedding blood. If I encountered one of those gentry, I should only let him see that I was armed, and perhaps fire over his head; I should not kill him.’

‘Then I am afraid he would kill *you*, Signorino mio,’ returned Sandro, with a grim smile. ‘Believe me, a shot-gun is best.’

Vincenzo only shrugged his shoulders. His feeling at that moment was that the man who should kill him would rather render him a service than otherwise; and sometimes he fancied that his life was not quite so safe as Sandro would have had him suppose. The Sard, as a rule, does not love strangers. For ‘Continents,’ as he calls his fellow-subjects on the mainland, he has a double hatred, as for a race which he considers inferior, but which, despite its inferiority, is gradually gaining possession of his lands, is making money out of them in ways which his own ignorance or sloth have prevented him from discovering, and is ruthlessly and senselessly cutting down his magnificent forests for charcoal. Now

Vincenzo, although a Sard by birth, was altogether Italian in nature and appearance ; he had made few attempts to ingratiate himself with the natives, whose language he did not speak, and by whom his first advances had been coldly received ; and so, as he rode past the miserable cabins—for the most part windowless and chimneyless—in which they dwelt, it not unfrequently happened that sullen glances were shot out at him from beneath black brows, which caused him to move about uneasily in his saddle ; for, notwithstanding his declared indifference to death, he was of a somewhat nervous temperament, and abhorred the idea of pain. However, nobody tried to assassinate him, and, as the monotonous days and weeks crept on, he began to think that even an ill-directed bullet might be better than no excitement at all.

Some modicum of excitement came at length into his life in a less objectionable form. The one thing that interested Vincenzo in the island which he so cordially detested was the dress of its inhabitants. This—or rather these ; for each district has its own costume—gratified his artistic eye, and he seldom let slip an occasion of studying them. Hearing, therefore, one fine hot day in May, that a great *festa* was taking place at Macomer, a village on the high land some twenty miles to the northward, he rode over thither in search of novelty—and found it. For, while he was listlessly looking on at the impetuous gyrations of some half-dozen couples of peasants who were dancing a *stornello* on the dusty little piazza before the church, there suddenly came upon him a sensation to which he had long been a stranger ; namely that agreeable quickening of the pulses which it was natural to him to experience on catching sight of a really beautiful young woman.

She was a girl of seventeen or eighteen, slight, exquisitely proportioned, and dressed in the kilted skirt, open bodice, cambric habit-shirt, and tightly-fitting jacket, ornamented with a profusion of silver buttons, which make up the holiday garb of the district to which she belonged. Her head and neck were swathed in folds of white linen, surmounted by a long hood of dark cloth reaching down to the waist—a head-dress which can hardly be considered pretty in itself, but which was by no means unbecoming to the small oval face, with its clear brown complexion, bright eyes, and rather coquettish smile, to which it formed a frame. Moreover, it had been so arranged, or disarranged, that a few irrepressible curls had escaped from beneath the linen folds, and fell over the low forehead of their fortunate possessor. She was being led into

the open space that had been cleared for the dancers by a tall, powerful-looking young man, and it seemed rather a pity that she should be going to make herself hot and dusty like the other rustics, to whom she was evidently so superior.

It presently appeared, however, that she had no intention of over-heating herself. She danced, not as the others did, with a wild barbaric fury which was almost painful to witness, but with the lithe grace of one to whom rhythmic movement is a form of art, like music or poetry. There was art, too, and a good deal of it, in her rendering of the measure, which, like all such dances, is in reality more or less of a pantomime. The demure smile or roguish glance with which she glided from every advance made by her partner, who, for his part was leaping and skipping like a young bull, was quite an epitome of rustic flirtation. Vincenzo watched her with the deepest interest; nor was this interest at all lessened when he discovered, as he did by-and-by, that the above-mentioned roguish glances were not intended exclusively for the bounding Hercules towards whom they should by rights have been directed. The young lady was evidently quite conscious of the fact that somebody else was looking at her; and that somebody else, not being of a timid temperament where her sex was concerned, resolved that he would take an early opportunity of making her acquaintance.

This opportunity was afforded to him very shortly—not altogether by accident perhaps. Standing upon the steps of the church, and looking down upon the dancers and the bystanders, he saw the girl abruptly withdraw from the circle, and, with a nod or a laughing word for various friends who hailed her, slip through the throng and disappear round the nearest corner. It is needless to add that the young Count was after her like an arrow out of a bow. He elbowed his way through the crowd with scant ceremony, and, passing out of the piazza, found himself immediately outside the village, upon the great high road which leads from Cagliari to Sassari and which approaches the heights of Macomer by a series of zigzags. There, leaning over the parapet, and to all appearance absorbed in contemplation of the wide prospect of mountain and plain which lay before her, was the fair unknown; and in less than five minutes Vincenzo had found out who she was, together with all such particulars of her history as he cared to hear. Her name, it appeared, was Teresina Bruschetti; she was an orphan, and dwelt with her sister-in-law, not at

Macomer, but at Bosa, a small town on the western seaboard about twelve miles away. Vincenzo's name and rank were no secret to her, nor was she in the least overawed by the latter; only, as she frankly confessed, very curious to know what had brought him to Sardinia, and why he remained in a country which everybody declared that he disliked.

Vincenzo laughed at her rapid questions, put with a mixture of innocence and coquetry which he found very captivating. He admitted that he was not much in love with his native island; 'but perhaps,' he added meaningfully, 'I shall look at it with other eyes now.'

'Oh, as far as that goes,' she rejoined, ignoring this innuendo, 'you have really not seen it yet. The country round Paulilatino is bare and sad, and even here at Macomer it is not much better; but Bosa is very different. At Bosa we have woods down to the water's edge, and groves of orange and lemon trees; and there is the river, too, and the old ruined castle above the town, where I often sit and spin in the afternoon, and watch the ships sailing away across the sea, and wish I were on board one of them.'

'Why do you wish that?' interrupted Vincenzo.

'Because I am like you,' she answered, laughing; 'I am a little tired of Sardinia. And yet I am not like you, really; for I have never left the island, and never shall.'

'Who knows?' returned Vincenzo, encouragingly. 'I shall certainly ride over to Bosa to-morrow, and, perhaps, I may be so fortunate as to find you among the ruins.'

This drew from her the first symptom of self-consciousness that she had yet displayed, in the shape of a slight blush. She turned away, saying, 'Oh, no; that is not likely; I only go there sometimes. Perhaps, after all,' she added, 'you would not care to see Bosa or the castle—or me either. And now, Signor Conte, I must wish you good-day, or they will wonder what has become of me.'

'Who will wonder?' Vincenzo asked. 'That long-legged fellow who was dancing with you?'

Teresina tossed her pretty head. 'He may wonder as much as he likes,' she declared; 'I should not hurry myself for him! But I must not stay here any longer. *A rivederla!*' And, with a wave of her hand, she darted across the road and was gone.

Bosa is, in truth, one of the few places in Sardinia which can boast of the especial beauty of scenery that one is accustomed to

associate with southern latitudes. It is a quaint, sleepy little town, hemmed in by high mountains, of which the lower slopes are clothed with cork and olive woods, and looking out from beneath the ruins of a mediæval fortress upon its silted-up harbour, and upon the broad blue sea beyond, which shuts it out from, instead of connecting it with, the world. Down the fertile valley, which stretches inland behind the town, flows a placid stream, on either side of which are the orange and lemon groves of which Teresina had boasted, fields of corn and maize, and mulberry trees, with here and there a tall palm. Unhappily, this smiling oasis bears a reputation for insalubrity notorious even in that island of fevers, where every variety of the malady is rife, from the deadly *perniciosa*, which will strike a man down and make an end of him in twenty-four hours, to the slow, enervating *intemperia*, which few can hope to escape. At Bosa, the women grow old long before their time; the men are for the most part a sickly, stunted race; the children look up at you with large black eyes, and pale, pathetic little faces. All this Vincenzo noticed as he rode through the narrow streets on the day after his interview with the fair Teresina, and he muttered to himself with a sigh, '*Mors etiam in Arcadia!*'

However, he was not in the mood for indulging in melancholy reflections. Having had some experience of feminine peculiarities, and reasoning, not without plausibility, that women are much the same all the world over, he felt tolerably certain that he should find Teresina somewhere within the precincts of the ancient keep; and, sure enough, after he had stabled his horse and scrambled up the heights on which the ruin stands, he obtained the desired proof that his knowledge of human nature had not played him false. She was seated in a shady corner, plying her distaff, and greeted him with a perfectly unembarrassed smile.

' You have really come, then ! ' she said.

' Of course I have come,' answered Vincenzo, throwing himself down on the short grass at her feet; and for some minutes they talked of the ruins and the scenery, and the weather, although, probably, neither of them felt any great interest in those topics at the moment. All at once the girl dropped her distaff across her knees, and bending forward till her lovely face was close to that of her companion—

' What made you take this long ride to-day ? ' she asked.

' Can you doubt ? ' returned Vincenzo reproachfully, making

that use of his fine eyes for which he conceived that they had been given to him.

'Because,' she continued, straightening herself up again, 'I had better tell you at once that we have always been honest people, and you must not suppose from my meeting you here that I am one of those girls who would allow a stranger to be the ruin of her.'

This piece of curiously plain speaking shocked Vincenzo a little, and disconcerted him a good deal. It might be natural for a peasant girl to call things by their names in that direct fashion,



and, perhaps, her doing so was only a proof of innocence; but his previous philanderings had not brought him into contact with peasants, and he did not in the least know what reply to make.

'Indeed, you are wronging me,' he said at last, with more or less of truth; 'I had no thought of—of what you allude to. Only I am desperately lonely in this wretched country; I have not a soul with whom I care to exchange a word; and I thought you would not grudge me the happiness of talking to you sometimes.'

'Oh, if it is only talking,' she said, 'you may do that as much as you please, and it will be a real pleasure to me to listen to you; though I don't know why you should care to talk to an

ignorant girl. Tell me about all the great cities where you have been, and the palaces, and the carriages, and the ladies in their diamonds ; that is what I like best to hear. Sometimes I read about it all in the newspaper ; but there is never half enough, and I can't understand unless I have some one to explain it to me.'

Vincenzo asked for nothing better than to comply with this request. He was simply starving for the want of a little sympathy, and almost any woman who was not physically repulsive, or mentally deficient, would have satisfied the craving that he felt. His present hearer was neither the one nor the other. With her elbows resting on her knees and her eyes fixed dreamily on the far horizon, she drank in the glowing descriptions that he gave of his beloved Florence ; nor was she less attentive when he went on to pour forth lamentations over the miseries of his exile. As soon as he paused she offered him a very practical piece of consolation. 'But this will not last for ever,' said she. 'The old Count will die soon, and then you will be free.'

For the second time Vincenzo was slightly scandalised. 'My father has never been like a father to me,' he remarked ; 'yet I can't go quite so far as to wish for his death.'

The girl looked at him wonderingly for a moment. 'Oh, not to *wish* for it,' she said ; 'still it is a thing which must happen ; and when it does happen, of course you will go away. I am not so fortunate ; I shall remain at Bosa always,' she added, sighing.

It was now Vincenzo's turn to act the part of consoler. 'No one can tell what the future may bring,' he observed oracularly. 'Perhaps you may yet see "the city of flowers and the flower of cities," and it may be my good fortune to show you Giotto's Campanile and the Boboli Gardens and the Cascine, where the ladies who interest you so much drive to and fro in the cool of the day. I feel certain that you were never born to waste your life on this desert island.'

He did not very well know what he meant by these vague phrases, which were half promises. His object was simply to say something which should be agreeable to his companion ; and in this he was certainly successful, for a faint flush crept into the olive-brown of the girl's cheek, and her eyes brightened. 'Tell me about them,' she exclaimed eagerly—'about the ladies, I mean, and the carriages, and the jewels !'

Vincenzo, nothing loth, resumed his narrative of bygone joys, smiling as he compared himself inwardly to Othello waking

the fancy of Desdemona. Or was he, perhaps, more like Faust stealing away the innocent heart of Marguerite? The latter parallel did not please him, and he hastened to dismiss it from his mind.

The sun was sinking when the two young people parted. Neither of them was tied down to hours, or likely to be missed by anxious relatives. ‘Will you come again some day?’ asked the girl wistfully, while Vincenzo held her little brown hand and wished her good night; and he answered, ‘I will come as often as you will let me.’

Nevertheless, as he rode away over the bare hills and moors, he began to doubt whether he would keep this promise. He was not over-squeamish; his principles were those of his age and his nation; he had always been accustomed to seize any kind of good luck that came in his way; but, for all that, he had a conscience. A young girl, as guileless presumably as a savage, and an orphan too!—No! it really would not do; ‘I am not a scoundrel!’ cried Vincenzo aloud; and, finding that the utterance of this modest boast did him good, he repeated it, ‘I am not a scoundrel; and—by all the saints of Heaven, I won’t go back to Bosa!’

It cost Vincenzo something to arrive at this heroic determination, which he did not record until the church of Paulilatino, with its collection of miserable dwellings huddled about it, was in sight. For by that time he had satisfied himself that the feeling which he entertained for the beautiful Teresina was no mere fancy, but downright, desperate love. In one sense this discovery made his resolution the more necessary; but on the other hand it unquestionably rendered the carrying out of it more difficult. This was far from being his first acquaintance with the tender passion, and, reasoning by analogy, he was justified in the hope that time would remove it; yet somehow he did not think that he had ever been *really* in love until now. To be sure, he had had the same conviction upon every previous occasion. Anyhow, his mind was made up; he would see Teresina no more.

Now, since Vincenzo Giave was not a man of iron will, it is by no means certain that weariness and loneliness might not have caused him ere long to break the engagement which he had made with his better self, had not circumstances taken all choice in the matter out of his hands. Most likely he had lingered too long in the treacherous evening air of Bosa; for the very next day he sickened of the fever, and for many long weeks afterwards he lay

on his bed, alternately burning and shivering, often delirious, and in his intervals of consciousness too prostrate and miserable to rise, as Sandro repeatedly besought him to do, and make an effort to shake off his malady. The Sindaco, who was also by way of being the village doctor, prescribed for him ; his father, who had never suffered from the climate himself and could not understand why any one else should do so, came in sometimes to see him and scolded him half kindly, half fretfully ; Sandro was unremitting in his attentions. But one and all said the same thing : he would not be himself again until after the autumn rains. ‘I should be all right if I could only get away,’ poor Vincenzo would moan ; but when he said this the old Count usually jumped up and hobbled out of the room with great celerity. Hardly even to save his son’s life could he have prevailed upon himself to pay the expenses of a journey to Florence.

But it was not, after all, a life or death matter. It was, as Sandro said, a case for patience—‘for patience and for a little courage,’ the worthy *fattore* would sometimes venture to add.

But Vincenzo was not to be roused by these mild rebukes. ‘What is the use of going out ?’ he would ask listlessly ; ‘what is there to do when one is out ? Let me try to sleep, since I can’t die.’ Once or twice, half maddened by solitude and by the ceaseless tick-tick of the old eight-day clock on the landing, he did creep out into the dry, neglected garden behind the house ; but the sunshine blinded him, the fine dust that hovered in the atmosphere choked him, and the din of the *cicale* (one must spend a summer in the south to realise how the grasshopper may become a burden) irritated his shattered nerves beyond bearing. He was glad to get back to semi-darkness, to semi-stupor, to confused dreams, in which the figure of Teresina was ever a prominent one.

For sickness had not cured Vincenzo of his love. When at length the time of sultry heat, of drought and universal inaction, had spent itself, when the first rains had fallen, when the parched earth had awakened from her annual trance, and when a delicious crispness freshened the morning air, the invalid began to feel his strength returning, and with it an irresistible craving to see Teresina once more. There was nothing to divert his thoughts from her ; he had absolutely no pursuits to fall back upon ; he was forgotten, or at any rate fancied himself forgotten, by all his friends. Was he to refuse himself the one poor pleasure that life could offer him because of scruples which, when all was said and

done, were perhaps exaggerated? There is only one sure way, as some cynical person has said, of getting rid of a harassing temptation, and that is to yield to it. As soon as Vincenzo was able to mount a horse again he was over the hills and away to Bosa; and in the joy of anticipation it seemed to him that even hated Sardinia, with its barren uplands and rocks and poverty-stricken villages, had become gay and beautiful. Bosa itself and the little valley, all green and fresh after the rains, looked like another Garden of Eden. He left his horse at the inn, and climbed, not without some difficulty, the steep path leading to the ruins.

She was not there. Of course it would have been rather a strange coincidence if she had happened to be on the exact spot where he had parted from her months before; yet, being still so weak, the young fellow was almost ready to cry like a fretful child over his disappointment. There were actually tears in his eyes, as, after waiting a long time in vain, he retraced his steps.

As he rode through the ill-paved streets, he peered eagerly at every hooded figure that flitted past him; but never a one among them was there resembling that of which he was in search, and it was not until he had crossed the bridge which leads out of the town, and was dejectedly breasting the hill towards home, that his heart suddenly stood still, and then began to beat like a steam-engine. Tripping down to meet him was a girlish form that he would have known among a thousand; and in his delight and surprise he hardly took note of the circumstance that she was accompanied by a young man, and that that young man was no other than the sturdy peasant whom he had seen dancing with her at the *festu* at Macomer.

Teresina started violently when she recognised the horseman, and a rush of colour came into her cheeks; but she recovered herself immediately, and greeted him with a cheery, unconcerned '*Buona sera, Signor Conte!*'

At the same time, however, she gave him a signal—a slight contraction of the brow and movement of the head—which Vincenzo was clever enough to interpret. He exchanged a few friendly words with her and rode slowly on up the winding road, feeling a pleasant assurance that she would join him before he should have proceeded very far upon his way. And so indeed it proved. He had not loitered up three of the long zigzags when there came a rustling sound in the bushes that bordered the highway, and Teresina, breathless but radiant, darted to his side.

' You came here to see me ?—you have not forgotten me ?' she panted.

' Forgotten you ?' cried Vincenzo. ' Ah ! if you only knew !' He checked himself, and added in a quieter tone, ' I have been ill ; that is why——'

' Yes, yes ; I know,' interrupted Teresina ; ' I heard of that, and I understood how it was that you could not come. Only I was afraid—I was afraid——'

Vincenzo had dismounted, he was standing close to the girl ; he saw that her lips were quivering, her eyes swimming. . . .

Alas for heroic resolutions ! we are but mortal. One instant later Count Vincenzo di San Benedetto di Giave was clasping Teresina Bruschetti in his arms and covering her face with kisses. She did not resist him. On the contrary, she let her lovely head drop upon his shoulder, murmuring, ' Oh, it is too beautiful ! it is like a dream ! '

All of a sudden she drew herself away and held her lover at arm's length. ' Is it *true*, then ?' she exclaimed. ' Shall we really be married some day, and will you take me to Florence, as you said ?'

Vincenzo's heart turned cold within him. *He* to marry a peasant girl ! Did she not see that it must be impossible ? ' We love one another ; is not that enough ?' he stammered guiltily.

' Oh, I know it cannot be yet,' answered the girl, misunderstanding him ; ' I know we must wait until you are your own master. But perhaps that will not be long ; and what signifies a year or two of waiting if we can look forward to being happy at last ? You are not deceiving me ?—oh ! I know you could not do that. But tell me yourself—tell me—is it really true that I shall be your wife some day ? '

Poor Vincenzo was not very strong-minded ; but he was an honourable man according to his lights. Realising to its full extent the sacrifice that was demanded of him, he yet saw but one course to pursue ; and he made his choice then and there. ' It is true,' he answered gravely. ' I swear to you that you shall be my wife as soon as I have a home to offer you.'

A good half-hour had elapsed before Teresina's accepted lover bethought himself of the young man in whose company he had encountered her, and began to make inquiries about him. ' Oh, he !' she said slightly, ' he is nobody ; only an old friend.

Yes, I believe he wants to marry me ; but that is of no consequence. You are not jealous ?'

' No,' answered Vincenzo ; ' why should I be jealous ? I am sorry for the poor fellow.'

' He will get over it and marry somebody else,' Teresina declared, laughing. ' And we shall really go to Florence, shall we not, and see the great ladies and their diamonds ? And perhaps, oh ! *perhaps*, I may have diamonds of my own when that time comes ! '

The persistency with which she recurred to this topic ended by vexing Vincenzo. ' Is it only for the diamonds that you care ? ' he asked reproachfully.

' Oh, no ! ' she answered, throwing her arms round his neck, and holding up her face to be kissed, ' for you too ! —you too ! '

III.



INCENZO rode homewards in a state of mingled elation and disquietude. He had sallied forth with no definite intention, and now, lo and behold ! a crisis had come upon him which must needs change the whole current of his future life. He accepted that change, not without trepidation, indeed, yet in a loyal spirit, reflecting that he was not the first man who had followed King Cophetua's doubtful precedent ; that there was such a thing as natural refinement ; that

exceptional beauty always counted for something ; and a good deal more to the like effect.

While one of the betrothed pair was thus consoling himself, the other was passing a somewhat uncomfortable five minutes

under an archway in a dim street of Bosa. Confronting her was the big-limbed young man of whom mention has already been made ; and the voice and gestures of this young man were full of wrath.

' You confess that you ran after that puppy,' he was saying ; ' you confess that you have been talking to him all this time ; and then you tell me not to be jealous ! Do you take me for a fool ?'

' Indeed I do, dear Paolo,' answered the girl sweetly. ' What else can I think when you speak so roughly and accuse me of such dreadful things ? If you cannot trust me now, what would it be when we were married ?'

' Marry me and you shall see,' returned the other eagerly. ' It would be quite different then ; I should have no fears for you. Marry me, and I swear that you shall never hear a rough word from my lips.'

' Now, Paolo,' remonstrated Teresina, ' how ridiculous that is ! You know very well that we must wait until you have laid by enough money to keep us from starving. And in the meantime you are not to be so suspicious, or you will frighten me away altogether. This poor Count Giave means no harm. He is lonely, and so am I when you are away at work. It amuses us to chatter together sometimes—*ecco !* If you are not satisfied——'

She finished her sentence with an expressive shrug.

Paolo scratched his head. ' So be it,' he said at last. ' But mind this. If ever your Count takes it into his head to say a word which a man might not say to his sister, I will kill him as I would a rabbit. You may tell him that from me.'

Teresina, however, did not see fit to deliver this message when next she met Vincenzo. Being, as will have been seen from the above fragment of dialogue, one of those prudent persons who are alive to the advantage of having a second string to their bow, she was above all things anxious to avert the chance of a collision between her two admirers ; and surely there was no reason why the one should ever find out whether words addressed to her by the other were of a fraternal character or not.

Nevertheless, it is not easy for a young man and maiden to meet continually without officious persons becoming aware of the fact and drawing their own conclusions from it ; and although Vincenzo and Teresina took what they conceived to be all proper precautions, they were not destined to escape the common lot.

On the one side, the gossips of Bosa began to wag their heads and their tongues ; on the other, Sandro thought it right to speak a word of warning to his young master.

' You have found an amusement, it seems, Signorino,' said he one day. ' I ask no questions ; only remember that you are in Sardinia, and that our women are jealously watched, while our men are apt to be over-ready with their knives.'

By way of reply Vincenzo pointed to the butt of his revolver, which, as usual, was sticking out of his waistband ; but the *fattore* sighed. ' If you would only be advised by me and carry a shotgun,' he said. ' It is so much safer. But the best way is to get into no quarrel at all.'

Vincenzo had neither intention nor expectation of using the weapon which Sandro so much disliked. He had ceased to look upon the Sards as a people of assassins, and was not conscious of having earned the enmity of any one among them. However, as he was riding home late one evening, after a long, blissful interview with the girl of his heart, he had a fine fright ; for in the loneliest part of the road a tall figure sprang from behind a rock and barred his path, calling out melodramatically : ' Signor Conte, beware ! You are playing a dangerous game. Suspicions I have ; I wait only for proofs. Believe me you are in no small peril of dying a violent death !'

And with that Paolo—for he it was—plunged into the darkness and vanished.

Vincenzo tried to laugh ; but the truth was he was by no means disposed for laughter. His nerves, not of the strongest at any time, were shaken by his long illness ; and although he would not tell Teresina of what had occurred, lest he should alarm her, he impressed upon her the necessity of prudence, varied their trysting-places as much as possible, and even suggested that it might be better to let the truth be known, if not as yet to his father, at least to her relations. But against this course she protested strenuously, declaring that her sister-in-law, whose intelligence was of a limited order, would never believe in the genuineness of her betrothal to one so far above her in rank, and would take instant measures for separating them irrevocably. Vincenzo did not press the point. He had fallen completely under the sway of the bright-eyed little woman, who did what she pleased with him. He had come to think her as clever as she was beautiful, and he reposed in her an unlimited confidence.

which she would have been very glad if Paolo had seen his way to imitate.

Thus things went on smoothly and pleasantly until the catastrophe came which was quite certain to come sooner or later. It was on a wooded height to the south of Bosa that the lovers were locked in a tender parting embrace, when Teresina suddenly wrenched herself away with a loud cry of terror; and Vincenzo, wheeling round, saw his rival running towards him. The peasant's



long knife gleamed in his hand; he was rushing on with the fury of a wild beast; there was no time for deliberation. Hardly knowing what he did, Vincenzo drew his revolver and fired. Instantly Paolo leapt high into the air, came down heavily upon his heels, and toppled over backwards, stone-dead.

'Ah! we are lost!—we are lost!' shrieked Teresina; and, without another word, she turned and fled like the wind.

Vincenzo was fain to do likewise. Frightened and horror-struck, he dropped his revolver, sprang upon his horse, and galloped away.

towards Paulilatino. He did not even stoop over his victim to see whether life was extinct ; he *knew* that the man would never move again.

As luck would have it—for the dazed youth knew not whither he was hastening—he encountered Sandro before reaching the outskirts of the village ; and to him he poured forth a hurried and incoherent account of what had happened.

‘ Away with you to the mountains, Signorino ! ’ cried the *fattore* ; ‘ this is a bad business. Here is a bunch of bread and cheese and a little wine ; it is all I have with me. Take them, and hide yourself in the mountains till I come to you. Stay ; you know the *nuraghe* on the hills to the right as you go towards Nuora : it is a lonely place, and it will do for you to conceal yourself in till we see how things are likely to go. You say there were no witnesses ? ’

‘ Only Teresina—only the girl,’ answered Vincenzo.

Sandro pursed up his lips and looked grave.

‘ She would die sooner than breathe a word ! ’ Vincenzo cried.

‘ Eh ! who knows ? But we must not waste time in talking. Ride as hard as you can, and turn the horse loose when you have done with him ; he will find his own way home. Keep up your courage, Signorino, and to-morrow, if I can do it safely, I will bring you food and news.’

Vincenzo obeyed his servant’s orders without hesitation or objection. The shock that he had received had thrown him into that condition of mental paralysis which, it is said, enables even cowards to mount the scaffold calmly, and the only clear impression on his brain was that he must hurry away somewhere and hide himself. But when he had reached the lonely nuragh to which Sandro had directed him, and, after casting his horse adrift, had crept into the circular chamber which forms the interior of all these constructions, and was alone, the horror and hopelessness of his position became all at once apparent to him. The night was dark and chilly ; he had no matches, and would not have dared to use them, had he had any ; he could not bring himself to touch the bread that he had brought with him. Throwing himself down with his face to the ground, he gave way to a paroxysm of despair.

Hunted men almost invariably become demoralised. The great majority of mankind will behave fairly well in a stand-up fight ; but to maintain your self-command after you have been

obliged to run-away requires another and a rarer kind of courage. Vincenzo did not possess it. All through that terrible night he grovelled on the earth in senseless, abject terror. More than once he was tempted to crawl out from his lair, go down to the nearest village, surrender himself, and so have done with it ; and, indeed, this would probably have been his wisest course ; for, after all, he had fired in self-defence, and a case might easily have been made out for him. But he could not rouse himself to action ; and when at length the day dawned he was conscious only of an intense animal longing for life. To be executed as a murderer, or, worse still, to be sent into penal servitude among the lowest of created beings !—it seemed impossible that such a horrible fate could befall him, Vincenzo Giave. And yet it was quite sure to befall him ; unless, indeed, Sandro could devise some means for his escape. From time to time he peeped cautiously out through the narrow aperture which served as an entrance to his place of concealment, watching with feverish impatience for the approach of the faithful *fattore* ; but many hours of intolerable suspense passed by, and it was not till late in the afternoon that he at last discerned a solitary horseman galloping towards him across the plain, and recognised the man who, he fondly hoped, might yet prove his deliverer.

Sandro tied up his horse to a tree and crept on hands and knees into the nurhag. ‘*Dio mio!*’ he exclaimed, feeling about in the darkness for his young master’s hand, ‘you are as cold as death. Here ! drink this wine and eat something. Afterwards we will talk.’

‘I cannot !’ gasped Vincenzo.

‘You must. I will not speak a word until you have done it.’

To humour him, Vincenzo hastily tossed off the contents of Sandro’s flask and swallowed a mouthful or two of food. ‘Now go on—quickly,’ he whispered. ‘What news do you bring ?’

‘The news is bad, Signorino ; the girl has confessed everything. I do not blame her, she was scared, and besides, if she had held her peace, it would have made no difference. Your pistol was found lying beside the body, and it seems that all Bosa knew there would be a quarrel. Ah, those revolvers !—did I not tell you that no good would come of meddling with them ?’

‘I never meant to kill the man,’ cried Vincenzo despairingly.

‘I know—I know. And to think that a charge of shot would

have answered all the purpose and done no sort of harm ! However, it is too late to talk about that now. The carabinieri are out scouring the country in search of you, and just before I left Paulilatino I heard that a large reward is offered for your capture. Now, listen to me, Signor Vincenzo, and for Heaven's sake don't shiver as though you were a poltroon. When night comes you must find your way over into Genargentù and hide yourself as best you may among the forests. Others have done it before now, and why should not you ? I have brought you some food, and you can get more, when that is gone, from the charcoal burners. For they may offer what reward they please, there is not a man in Sardinia so base as to hand a poor fellow over to those cursed carabinieri. Your father has given me all the gold he had in the house—a hundred Napoleons ; you may imagine what a treat it was to him to part with them ! I have sewn them into this belt, which you are to put on. And here is a good knife, in case—in case it should be wanted. For the moment we dare not try to get you down to the coast ; but in a month or two it will be easier. Then we shall send you in a sailing-boat to Naples, where you will take your passage for America. The Signor Conte feels very confident about obtaining your pardon ; only not yet. He thinks at least a year must pass before he could venture to ask for it, and even then it will cost a great deal of money. In a word, there is great danger; but the case is not desperate, if you will only be brave and prudent. Have you understood me ?' concluded Sandro, as Vincenzo remained speechless.

'I understand you,' answered the other, in a dull, hopeless voice ; 'but I can't do what you say ; it would be only dying a hundred deaths instead of one. I think I will give myself up to the carabinieri.'

The *fattore* struck his hands together in despair. 'Signor Vincenzo,' he cried, 'don't break my heart ! Have you no courage ?'

'I don't know, Sandro,' answered the young man, breaking into an odd, short laugh. 'I think I have ; only I can't lay my hand upon it, somehow.'

'What is the use of courage that can't be found when it is wanted ?' groaned the *fattore*, with almost comical pathos.

There was a pause of some minutes. Then Vincenzo said, 'Have you a pencil and a scrap of paper about you ? Yes ? Then strike a light, and let me write something.'

He scribbled a few hurried lines to Teresina, telling her where he was and of the plan which had been suggested to him for regaining his liberty. 'I cannot do otherwise than release you from your engagement to me,' he wrote; 'and yet you are all that I care to live for. Send me one word by the bearer (who can be implicitly trusted) to say that at least you will not forget me.' He had settled in his heart that upon that word it should depend whether he would allow himself to be captured, or take the forlorn hope of escape held out to him.

When he had done writing he folded the paper and handed it to Sandro. 'Can I stay here two days more?' he asked.

Sandro shook his head. 'Better not.'

'But is it possible?'

'Of course it is *possible*.'

'Then, my dear, good Sandro, do me one last kindness. Take this paper to Teresina Bruschetti at Bosa, and bring me her reply the day after to-morrow.'

Sandro protested loudly and long. It was madness, he said, to run such needless risks; but Vincenzo was resolute; and, after a long debate, the *fattore* yielded against his better judgment.

'If I do this for you,' he said at last, 'will you in return do what I ask you and make for the mountains?'

'I think I will,' answered the young man. 'I won't promise, but I think I will. I have to find my courage first, you know,' he added, with a faint smile.

IV.



HERE was another long period of suspense before Vincenzo ; but his nerves were steadier now. He felt that the worst was over, and that never again could he go through such an agony as that which was past. He managed to eat and drink without much difficulty, and slept from sheer exhaustion.

The night passed, the day came again, and hour after hour stole by in an unbroken stillness. Every now

and again he looked at the long double-edged knife which Sandro had given him, and felt its sharp point. 'If the worst comes to the worst,' he thought, 'this would be better than the guillotine or the galleys.'

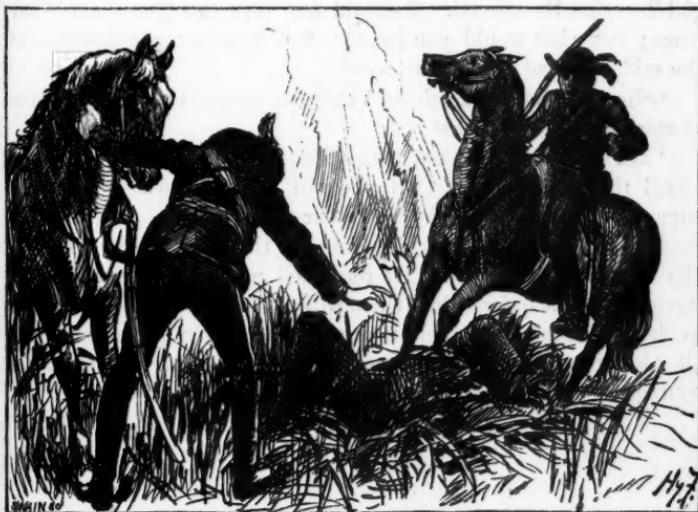
But somehow he could not help hoping. There seemed to be hope in the air, in the bright sunshine, in the coursing of his own young blood. Only once or twice it came across him with a swift, shuddering chill that he was a murderer, and that, happen what might, that hideous fact could never be obliterated.

Once more the night fell, bringing snatches of sleep with it, and once more the grey dawn broke. And then, far earlier than he had dared to hope for it, the longed-for sound of a horse's hoofs galloping struck upon his ear. He thrust his head through the narrow opening and looked out eagerly.

Alas ! it was not Sandro who was spurring across the dewy pasture-lands, but a mounted carabiniere ; and Vincenzo, seeing him, knew that his hour had come. He did not attempt to withdraw into his hiding-place, but lay there, as if fascinated, watching

the approach of fate. Presently he made out another carabiniere riding through the morning mists on the far right, then another on the left, and yet another, who seemed to be making straight for the hills behind the nurhag. He saw it all now: he was surrounded, taken in a trap, and escape was as impossible as resistance.

'Vincenzo Giave, come out and surrender yourself!' shouted the first horseman, as soon as he was within hailing distance, and the fugitive obeyed immediately.



'You need not take precautions,' he said, for the man had covered him with his carbine. 'I am not going to struggle or run.'

He held out his wrists for the handcuffs with a smile. The misery of fear was over and done with now, and he had never felt more calm in his life.

'By-the-by,' he asked, pausing for a moment, 'how did you find out that I was here?'

'We had information,' answered the man curtly and rather sullenly. 'A reward was offered, and it has been claimed.'

'I am sorry that you should have been deprived of the reward,' said Vincenzo. 'And who is the fortunate fellow who is to get it?'

The man hesitated, lowering his eyes. His companions had ridden up by this time, and had surrounded their prisoner. ‘What signifies that?’ growled out one of them. ‘It is no business of ours. Nor of yours either,’ he added to Vincenzo.

‘Pardon me, my friend,’ returned the young man mildly, ‘but I think it concerns me a little, and it can do you no harm to gratify my curiosity. You would not wish to refuse such a small favour as that to one who will never be able to ask another favour of a fellow-creature.’

‘Well, well,’ said the man who had spoken first, ‘it was the girl Teresina Bruschetti. I should not have betrayed you in her place; but what would you have? She is poor; and besides, as she said, you had killed her lover.’

‘She said that?’ exclaimed Vincenzo, who had turned as white as marble—‘she said that?’

‘*Eh, perdio!* was it not true? But you had better not answer,’ added the man hastily. ‘If you will take my advice, you will engage a good advocate and hold your tongue.’

But Vincenzo was not listening to this well-meant counsel. His hands were still free. He remained motionless for a second, staring straight before him; then, with a sudden, swift movement, he drew Sandro’s knife, held it at arm’s length, and, putting forth all his strength, buried it deep in his breast—having found his courage at last, as some may think.

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